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OUR MOTHER CHURCH:

BEING SIMPLE TALK ON HIGH TOPICS.

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RIVINGTONS, WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON.



"THE SUN-GOD IS COME AMONG US."—PAGE 25.

BY THE KING AND QUEEN

A STORY OF

THE DAWN OF RELIGION IN BRITAIN

BY

MRS. JEROME MERCIER

AUTHOR OF 'OUR MOTHER CHURCH,' ETC.

C.

RIVINGTONS

WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON

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Mar 22, 1893
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TO

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND

EVA HANBURY-TRACY

I dedicate

THIS STORY OF HER OWN COUNTY

IN OLDEN TIME

WITH SINCERE AFFECTION AND GOOD-WILL.

PREFACE

THIS story was first suggested to the writer's mind by the local proverb—“*As sure as God's in Gloucestershire*”—coinciding with the fact that some of the earliest records of Christianity in our land are connected with this county. The curious stones called “The King and Queen,” one of which bears a singular resemblance to a human head, were annually white-washed until a very recent date ; and at a Court leet which used to be held close by, the proceedings were never opened till the clerk had asked the permission of the King and Queen. There seems to be no doubt that they have

been objects of reverence from a period of remote antiquity. The local colouring and traditions have been carefully studied, and perhaps may add some little interest to our meditation on the great boon which we inherit from our "rude forefathers" on whom the great dawn first arose.

ANNE MERCIER.

KEMERTON RECTORY,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE, 1886.

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CHAPTER I.

ON BREDON HILL.

——Subtle as the fox for prey,
Like warlike as the wolf for what we eat,
Our valour is to chase what flies ; our cage
We make a quire, as doth the prisoned bird,
And sing our bondage freely.

SHAKESPEARE, *Cymbeline*.

BREDON HILL is the last of the long Cotswold range which stretches throughout Gloucestershire. On one side, gently sloping down, and falling back to meet its brother hills, to which (though it stands apart from them, and alone) it is closely allied ; on the other it shows a bold, broken, wooded front, picturesque and independent, facing the more mountainous line of the Malverns. Between the two lies a broad valley, watered by the Avon and the Severn, now varied with wood and field, and dotted with neat villages. Once, it is said, this valley was an arm of the sea ; but at the time of

which we write—some fifty years after the Birth of our Lord—the woods stretched far and wide, parted only by such small clearings that they hardly showed in the landscape. Here and there was a broad patch of marsh land sown with reeds, used in building the huts of the Britons, and sometimes a circle of these huts, a “town” so called, but so low as to be almost invisible from the hill-top, was surrounded by a little pasture, enclosed, and fed upon by cattle. No corn was grown in this part of Britain; the natives lived on flesh alone, milk, metheglin, or mead made from fermented honey, and a coarse meal prepared from acorns, with bread, as a luxury, made from corn grown nearer the coast.

Gazing on this broad stretch of forest, this

“boundless contiguity of shade,”

was a girl of some fifteen summers. She leaned upon a low wall encircling a space on the very summit of the Bredon (or Breodun) Hill.¹ Behind her were the dwellings of her people,—round huts contrived of strong rough stakes thrust into the ground, closely interwoven, and roofed with rushes. It was a quiet moment, for the men were not yet

¹ Probably from *braid*, “great,” and *den*, “a forest.”

returned from hunting and fishing, and the women were preparing the evening meal. Only an old man, half-blind, sat at the entrance of one of the huts, weaving a mat of coarse grass, and crooning a song in a harsh, cracked voice. Below the wall on which the girl leaned was the deep ditch that protected the encampment, and again below her where she stood, the hill fell abruptly, thickly clothed with short, sturdy oaks. The Malvern Hills, far across the valley, were of a deep grey violet, beautiful to look upon, and behind them was a glorious blaze of golden sunset dappled with crimson cloudlets.

The girl who watched it was beautiful. Her cheeks, though browned by the sun, were of a pure creamy softness, brightly tinged with healthy red; her lips were red and full; her hair was dark, richly curling, and, falling loosely over her shoulders, made for them a mantle. Her eyes were of a dark grey, shaded by long lashes, and there was a strange, deep longing in them as they rested on the scene, but ever and anon glanced downwards among the trees below her. Her dress was a tunic of skins with wide sleeves, a throat-clasp of brass, and a belt of leather. Her feet were clad in buskins of skin,

worn with the fur inside, and strapped on with leather thongs reaching to the knee.

All was quiet—that strange tingling silence of evening, when every sleepy bird-note or quiver of insect life seems to fret the intense calm. The girl's breath came with a short, panting sound, and her breast heaved.

All of a sudden there was a low cry like a quail-call among the trees. A sort of thrill passed through the girl's frame, and in a few seconds, after looking round among the huts behind her, still showing no sign of life, she began, in a rich sweet voice, but softly, to sing a hymn to a monotonous tune in a minor key—

“O King of Day, go to thy western bed,
By all thy flocks and herds accompanied,
Thy golden flocks, that follow thee afar,
To fold them where the holy pastures are.”

While singing, she put her hand within the bosom of her dress, and drew out a wallet of plaited grass tied with a long cord. This she let down over the wall, but cautiously hiding the action with her body, even from the half-blind old man behind her. She did not cease her song, which went on and on in a long and wandering strain.

Presently, without any sound, a man stood beneath the wall, and held up his hand for the wallet, which she let drop into it. He was of middle age, hollow-cheeked, lean, hairy; but his gentle dreamy eyes and sweet smile lit up his gaunt face, and made it beautiful and like the girl's. She bent over the wall, stretching out her arms as if to embrace him, but he darted back into the shadow of the trees, shaking his head, and laying a finger on his lips.

"My mother, how is she?" whispered the girl.

"Sick, sick," he answered sorrowfully; then, pointing to the right, and laying his hand upon the quiver of arrows at his side, he vanished.

The girl laid her head on her arms, and tears ran over her hands. But behind her arose a sound of voices, laughter, rough song. The men were coming home with their booty. Hastily wiping her eyes, the girl slid away, and entered the low door of one of the huts.

CHAPTER II.

UNGETORIX THE DRUID.

And still, 'mid yon thick woods, the primal truth
Glimmers through many a superstitious form
That fills the soul with unavailing ruth.

WORDSWORTH.

THE men came to the edge of the trench, opposite a gate in the wall which surrounded the fortress, and there gave a shout. Out from their doors ran certain sturdy matrons, unbarred the gate, and thrust out a rude bridge of planks chained together, until it touched the other side of the trench. The men thronged across it, drew in the bridge, rebarred the gate, and threw down their booty, while the women stood admiring. There were a young deer, some smaller game, and a fine salmon wrapped in rushes and still palpitating. They were carried away to hang in the common larder, and the men dispersed to their several huts to cleanse them-

selves of the stains of the sport, while the women hastened to bring the supper, of which each had prepared a part, to a larger hut than the rest, standing in the centre of the encampment, and used as a mess-room.

Presently all the men returned, and were soon seated round a rough wooden table, on which were wooden platters, fish and meat steaming in osier dishes, the sauce or liquor being served in earthenware vessels of ungraceful form.

At the head of the table sat a white-haired warrior, who was evidently the captain of the band. As he drew the knife from his girdle, and attacked the joint before him, others did the same, and the meat was soon hewn to pieces and passed round, while the women poured out drink.

The girl who was watching the sunset was waiting among the rest, and the aged warrior called to her—

“Lusindora, come; pour out for me, my girl.” Then catching her hand, and fondling it, he added tenderly: “How have you passed the day?—spinning, plaiting? Have you been good and well amused?”

“I hope so, sire,” answered the girl, with an

affectionate but serious smile, more befitting a woman than one of her years.

“And I will be bound you have been polishing your silver bracelets for the feast,” he added.

The girl laughed, and passed on.

Among those at table was a lad, somewhat older than herself, with rich auburn hair, but in feature very like the captain. He too tried to address her as she passed, and when she did not answer, asked her for drink; but she went by to serve an older man, and another woman filled the lad's cup.

As the meal approached its close, a woman hurriedly entered, saying in a loud whisper: “Ungetorix the Druid!” All rose to their feet, hastily wiping their knives on leaves placed on the table for the purpose, and replacing them in their belts, for no Druid priest might bear a sword, and it was not permitted to greet one, weapon in hand. On most faces was a look of respectful attention, but on many also a sullen expression of dread, while the girl Lusindora, who stood in the shade, turning her back upon the door, played with the fastening of her belt, with a shadow of bitter hatred on her handsome features.

A man of unusual height and over middle age

entered with a proud and measured step, slightly bowing in answer to the salutations on all sides. His features were large and well formed, but haughty, and his eyes were cold and gleaming under shaggy eyebrows. Whereas the other men wore only moustachios, the Druid had a curling beard, and, in place of their coats of skins, he was clad in a long flowing robe of woven wool, with a clasp of iron wrought in a symbolic design. On his head he bore a wreath of oak, and in his hand a wand.

"I have come, my children," he said, in a rich, penetrating voice, "to ask if you are prepared for the solemn rites of to-morrow. Before the dawn must each be ready, his ablutions duly performed, and his offering in his hand."

"We are ready, father," they answered.

"Before your gate assemble on the hill: the men in two ranks in front, the women behind them."

"We will obey, father," all answered.

Ungetorix cast a glance around, which rested for a moment on Lusindora, in shadow though she was, and then, with another haughty salutation, he retired.

When he was gone the talk became general.

"They say Caradoc himself will be here to-

morrow to lead us on the next day to the great games at *Caer Glau*." So spoke one of the warriors. "Have you heard it, *Vardex*?" he asked, turning to the captain.

"I heard such a rumour, but I scarce believe it. The *Silures* are over rough for a chief of the *Trinobantes*," answered *Vardex* with a sneer.

"Father," cried the handsome lad who had tried to attract *Lusindora*'s attention, "the brave *Caradoc* has never scorned us, nor said a word to prove that he despised our wild ways after the luxuries of his father *Cymbeline*'s court."

"Where there is luxury there is little truth and little faith, my boy, as you may learn in time," answered *Vardex*, rising from table; and all strolled out to their several duties.

The lad found himself side by side with *Lusindora* at the door of the tent which she had entered before supper.

"My father is jealous of the rule of *Caradoc*, because he is not of our tribe," said he; "but for me, I have never seen his like, and his noble face seems to me to be but the sign of as noble a heart. When he meets the Romans in battle, may I be beside him!"

“ I long to see him,” answered the girl.

“ Well, be sure you will, no later than to-morrow. You will wear your robe of white skins, in which you look so beautiful, will you not ? ”

“ Perhaps,” she answered carelessly.

“ *Perhaps!* What, for the sacred rites not wear your best ? And you are not painted,” he cried, taking up her hand, and looking at the wrist and arm. “ We have to be stirring with the dawn. Why are you so slow, Lusindora ? ”

“ I will paint myself for the games,” she answered.

“ For the games, and not for the sacred rites ? O Lusindora ! ”

“ I hate the rites ; they are not sacred to me ! ” she cried, low but vehemently, clenching her hand and beating her foot on the ground. The lad looked at her with an expression of fear and horror.

“ Oh hush, Lusindora ! Why do you say such things ? ”

“ The priests are cruel men ; the rites are bloody and cruel ; the priestesses are bad, cruel women. I hate them all ! ”

The lad looked round to see if any one were near to hear this dangerous speech, for disrespect to the

Druids meant outlawry and death. But happily they were alone.

“There are no human sacrifices to-morrow,” he said soothingly; “and if there were, the priests must do their duty; they must appease the gods.”

“Lareth, I cannot believe that the gods need blood and cruelty,” she exclaimed, but still in the same subdued voice. “Look there!” she cried, extending her hand towards the sky, where a young moon was gently shining in the transparent blue,—“Look at that beauty, and those soft hills, and look at ourselves, young and strong and able to be happy. Do you think He who made us all loves blood and pain? No; He loves joy and tenderness and mercy; and the priests tell lies.”

Lareth looked at her as if he mistrusted his ears.

“Where have you learned all this?” he asked.

She turned away, and would not answer.

“If you love me, Lusindora, say these things to no one but me. They would grieve our father and anger Ungetorix.”

“Ungetorix!” she repeated, with an expression of the utmost and most concentrated hatred. “No, I cannot afford to anger him yet—not yet.”

“Lusindora,” said the lad gently, putting his arm

around her neck, "do not speak thus. You are not like yourself. Perhaps some evil spirit has got power over you. Do not refuse to dress for the rites. It would grieve our father, and make the women blame him. Let me paint you my own best pattern that Lunda taught me."

The girl turned on him her deep lustrous eyes, which were filled with tears, and were now soft and loving.

"I would not grieve Vardex," she said. "Come then, Lareth, get your style, and paint me if you will."

CHAPTER III.

BEARING THE MISTLETOE.

And you, O Druids, free from noise and arms,
Renewed your barbarous rites and horrid charms ;
What gods, what powers, in happy mansions dwell,
Or only you, or all but you, can tell.

LUCAN, *Pharsalia*, B. II., translated by Kennett.

THE first cold breath was heralding the dawn of a March day, and the early chirping of the birds was but just beginning, when the inmates of the camp on Bredon Hill began to pour across the drawbridge on to the space beyond. The Silures, inhabiting South Wales and the adjoining counties, were some of the original inhabitants of Britain, who (so far as history or tradition can tell us) came over ages before from Gaul. They were dark, short, and strong, and in their habits were a full century behind the tribes of the southern and eastern coasts, whose population was mixed with Teutonic races. Thus, although in the east woven stuff was generally

worn, the men and women of the Silures wore skins alone—and indeed never was a warmer or more becoming garb. The men—mostly handsome, stalwart fellows—were tattooed and painted for the feast with the dark blue dye of the woad, a small yellow flower still found growing on the banks of the Severn at Tewkesbury, five miles from Bredon Hill. The women, too, were painted on their wrists, ankles, and temples, and the “best pattern” of Lareth was like delicate bracelets on Lusindora’s arms. Her tunic of white rabbits’ fur did indeed suit well with her rich complexion and dark hair. She stood beside Lunda, an aged matron of the fort, who, in her rough way, was as a mother to the girl—for poor Lusindora was desolate, though not an orphan. Her father, a brave soldier, had angered the Arch-Druid Ungetorix by a passionate resistance at one of those cruel festivals when human sacrifices were offered, and he was an exiled, excommunicated man. None could withstand the power of the Druids; few dared oppose them. Those who did met with a terrible fate. The outlaw of later days was happy compared with the man who was under the ban of the Druids. None dared relieve him, shelter him, or even speak to him, or a like fate

might befall that man. When Rargon stood defying the Druid, and protecting with his person a timid, shrinking youth who was destined for sacrifice, and when the terrible words, "Thou art cast out!" thundered from the lips of Ungetorix, Rargon's wife, rushing through the crowd, clung to him, and was coupled with him in his disgrace. But when she stretched out her arms to her child, the Druid held the little creature as in a vice. "The child is ours," he said, and stood glaring with his cold steely eyes on the unhappy pair as they were dragged from the sacred circle, and cast loose upon the woods, to dwell with the wild beasts. Vardex had begged the child, and it had been as a daughter to him. A tiny thing at that time, scarce able to speak plain, Lusindora was now a creature of beauty, and of deep, passionate, restrained feeling, respectful and tenderly attentive to her adoptive father, but possessing powers of devotion which he could not call forth.

As the first rays of the sun darted over the Cotswold range, the notes of a hymn, accompanied by harps, came swelling across the hillside, and soon the Druid train were seen emerging from a little copse. At their head was Ungetorix, clad in flowing garments of white wool. He bore a sceptre,

and on his head was a mystic tiara of gold, with a circular ornament of considerable size beneath each ear, chased with a symbolic character. Behind came six priests, similarly robed, but with oak wreaths on their short hair, and after them the priestesses, tall shapely women, also dressed in white, with crowns of oak. The chief priestess wore also a mantle of purple, of almost regal splendour, and in her hand she bore a golden sickle. The others carried rude harps, and played them as they walked, and sang. Behind these came two youths, each leading a milk-white bull.

When the train approached the camp, the little crowd bowed reverently, and marched in order, at a sign from the Druid's wand, to a place in the rear of the procession. Then began the solemn search for the sacred mistletoe, sacred when found upon an oak-tree. The whole procession wound slowly, to the measure of their hymns, along the hillside, up and down, now stopping, now receding, now advancing. At times the music would swell loud and wild, and then the march was quick and sure ; at times it sank almost to a whisper, and then the Druids and the chief priestess would stand with bent heads, as if lost in thought.

At length Ungetorix, raising his wand between his thumbs and the two first fingers of each hand, held it erect before him, and listened fixedly to the music, with eyes rapt and strange, seeming absorbed in some distant object. Gradually the wand or sceptre turned, without any visible motion of his hands, and slanted towards a little grove upon the north-eastern edge of the hill. The harps and voices struck up loudly and joyfully, and the whole train proceeded, with a confidence that their search would be successful. Marching straight towards the grove, winding in and out among its dense boughs with no doubt or hesitation, the sceptre inclining directly north-east, the Druid led the way to the foot of an aged oak, surrounded so densely by undergrowth that only a few could approach. Those who did, however, raising their heads, saw the mystic plant upon the second bough, and sent forth a shout which was taken up by those without. The mistletoe was found. The youths who led the bulls attached them to the oak. The Druid, lightly springing on the shoulders of two stalwart priests, and taking the golden sickle from the priestess, set his foot upon the lower bough and skilfully severed the mistletoe, though the strain and position were such as would

have tried many a younger man. The mistletoe fell into a white cloth worked with gold, held by the priestess; and the second Druid, taking a long sharp knife from one of the youths, pierced the throats of the patient animals tethered below the tree.

Then, leaving the youths and two priests to divide the carcasses, to separate the parts for sacrifice from those used for the feast, the procession wound its way out of the coppice into an open space looking toward the west.

This space lay under a shoulder of the hill. A fall in the ground made a deep semicircular bank, and upon this rose a number of hoary stones, others having been added to form a sacred circle. Two larger than the rest had the rude semblance of human heads, perhaps increased by the Druids' art. These were held in deep reverence by the people as images of the gods, and were said to have fallen from heaven. Nor were the people altogether wrong, for the stones had fallen indeed, though not so far as was supposed. In some landslip in early days, long before the Christian era, they had been deposited in this place; and those who heard the rush of the falling mass were astounded to find these

rude monuments placed there without hands. They were known among the people as the "King and Queen," and were held to represent their chief deities, answering to the Roman Mercury and Minerva, the patrons of wisdom.

Then the golden sun flashed his bright beams suddenly from a veil of cloud which had sheltered him hitherto. The little grey clouds broke up and fled away in groups, the blue spread out, pure and free, like a canopy, and the people joined in a hymn to the God of Day, which resounded like a war-shout far and wide.

Lusindora's eyes filled with tears of emotion. She had quick, deep feeling, and the shout of a multitude is to such persons an overpowering thing. Lareth was at her side, and he wondered why she was weeping.

"Lareth," she whispered, "when they are singing 'Hail' to the sun, I feel as if the sun were but a window through which the brightness of a greater God was shining upon us."

Lareth put his hand hastily over her mouth, and glanced instinctively at Ungetorix. His stern look seemed fixed upon them, and Lareth trembled, though he was fifty paces distant.

CHAPTER IV.

CARACTACUS.

So, when the sun in bed,
Curtain'd with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail,
Each fetter'd ghost slips to his several grave.

MILTON.

THE day had sped in the alternations of sacrifice, feast, and exercise for the morrow, the men practising those games in which they were to vie at *Caer Glau* (now Gloucester) with the best and strongest from every neighbouring tribe.

The sun was in the west. From his cradle in the soft bosom of the gentle Cotswolds he had come to the more rugged Malverns, now gloomy, and edged with a lurid rim as of fire, while the setting rays came forth from under a dense veil of purple cloud.

A thin thread of flame was ascending from an altar, whereon smoked the relic of the slaughtered

animals, and the last event of the day was to be the reception of an infant by Druidic rites.

Beside "The King" was a smaller rock, and between the two one of those natural rings which are still an object of superstitious veneration in Cornwall and elsewhere. After certain ceremonies, which were now over, the child was to be passed by the priestess through the ring, and thus consecrated to the gods. The mother stood, with a solemn look on her face, holding her little one. The violet-robed priestess stood by her. Ungetorix, in a prominent position, thus addressed the parents and the rest who were assembled round him :—

"As our great god goes to his rest, we dedicate this child," he said, in his deep, awe-inspiring voice. "We choose this hour, the type of death, to remind us that all are mortal—this child also. But let his parents be assured that, as our Star of Day is ever new-born after his burial in the grave of night, so shall the human soul live anew. But where, and how?" Here the voice of the speaker grew more solemn, and his attitude more imposing. "That shall be as his conduct towards the gods and to their servants the priests shall merit. Shall it be as the vile toad, the newt, the worm, to grovel and

be tortured? Yes ; if he have shown insolence to the higher powers. But if he have sought wisdom, coupled with temperance, with valour, and with reverence to that which is holy, then shall his soul pass into higher forms, and ere long into the abodes of bliss. This rite demands the aid of innocence.—Lusindora, go up and receive the infant as he leaves the hands of our priestess.”

Two persons started and turned pale at this address : the priestess, who glared with an astounded and evil eye on the girl ; and that girl herself, who trembled at being thus singled out to take part in a ceremony which was usually confined to consecrated persons. There was a general movement as the priestess ascended the grassy bank towards the ring of stone, which was in a somewhat elevated position. The mother drew near with her babe, and the rest to behold. Lusindora found Ungetorix by her side, his hand on her shoulder, and his eyes soft with an unwonted expression.

“Are you afraid, my child?” he said. “Nay ; it may be yours to do more for the gods than this. Ascend !”

He pointed to the bank, up which she sprang as agile as a roe, glad to escape, and placed herself

behind the ring, through which the eyes of the priestess glared upwards at her.

Then arose a chorus of sacred maidens; and the priestess, taking the child from his mother, passed it through the ring, muttering an invocation to the gods, while Ungetorix made mystic signs with extended arms and sceptre. Lusindora received the child, and held it on her breast while the final words were spoken.

As she stood there, she alone facing the west, the gaze of all besides being turned towards her as she held the babe above the sacred ring, her eyes fell on a gigantic form behind the crowd. His size was above that of common men—far above that of any of the Silures, except Ungetorix,—and, standing on a vantage-ground of a grassy knoll, he seemed to Lusindora more than human. His face, as he stood with his back to the setting sun, she could not see; but his yellow hair, spread around his head, was filled with the light behind, as though it too were rays of light. On his head gleamed a golden circlet, a golden collar on his neck; his attitude was easy and commanding, his hand on the hilt of the great sword, sheathed out of respect for the Druid. There were a few companions near him, but them

Lusindora hardly saw: the noble form, all light and prismatic gleam, mastered her senses. Claspings the child to her breast with one arm, she extended the other, and cried—

“The Sun-god is come among us.”

As she cried there was silence, for the last notes of the hymn had died away softly. A thrill ran through the people, and they turned and looked.

Then there began a murmur of “Caradoc!” and it ran round the assembly; and of a sudden the soldiers took it up with a shout, and saluted the great leader—Caradoc to them, Caractacus in the court and to the Romans. He returned their salute with an easy dignity, and, approaching, bent before the Druid, though scarcely with the reverence accustomed.

“I crave your blessing, father,” he said; and it was given. Then, turning to the people, he spoke in a strong manly voice, which seemed to come straight from the heart, and to have a joyous fund of mirth beneath it—

“I should be prouder than I am of your kindly welcome, friends, but that yon little maid of yours has made me too proud to regard aught beside. It is the first time I have been called a god, and will be the last, I doubt not.”

He looked up at the girl, and she could see his handsome features, his gleaming teeth, and merry eyes, which, nevertheless, had a kingliness that none could deny. She was very lovely as she stood there, in her white fur robe, her dark hair floating round her shoulders, the red light on her face, and her large eyes open with a startled admiration. He gave her a gracious nod.

“Is she one of your priestesses, Ungetorix?” he asked. “If so, you have a bonny one.”

“Not yet, my lord,” answered Ungetorix gravely; and at this moment Lusindora found the priestess by her side.

“You forget yourself, maiden,” she murmured angrily; “give the babe to its mother.”

Lusindora, ashamed, mingled with the crowd, and sought the side of Lunda. Caradoc and his companions, who were now beside him, were the centre of the circle. Most of them were attendants, but there was one—older than Caradoc; like him, but without the mirth—with a very venerable air. He smiled gravely as Lusindora approached him by a movement of the crowd. He laid his hand on her head, and the girl felt as if it bore more blessing than a priest’s.

“Who is that, Lunda?” she whispered.

“That is Bran, the brother of the good King Cymbeline, father of Caradoc,” she answered.

It was the first time that Bran had come face to face with the grim heads of stone, the “King and Queen,” silently watchful, with their cold, grim features. Little did the mistaught worshippers know that, when he should next be there, he should come as the herald of One before whom Mercury and Minerva, Belus and Astarte, should pale and tremble, even before the day when the sun shall be darkened, and the moon not give her light.

CHAPTER V.

CAER GLAU.

By the margin, willow-veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges, trail'd
By slow horses.

TENNYSON.

ON the morrow there was a lively scene on the river Severn. Between its banks of rich grass or red clay slowly moved the barges containing the warriors of Bredon, and in front of these the sacred boat of the Druids. Ungetorix stood before the mast, as motionless as a statue, his robes of white wool falling in heavy folds about his kingly figure. His mystic tiara was on his head; his chin rested in his hand, and thus he stood in thoughtful mood for the greater part of the transit. The priestesses were no longer the stern personages of the previous day. Reclining on cushions, they listened to a young Druid, who sang ballads to his harp, or threw

the merry jest about, though in soft tones, for fear of awakening the displeasure of their chief.

In the next barge came Caradoc, Bran, and Vardex, with half the garrison of the fort, the rest following in a third; while around these heavy barques skimmed the native coracle of basket-work and skin, or the still simpler canoe made of a tree-stem hollowed by fire. In one of these latter came Lusindora with Lareth and Lunda. Her eyes were dreamy, and though she smiled as Lareth drew her attention to this or that upon the shore, her look turned at every interval to the British chieftain, whose golden hair beneath the golden circlet still seemed to her the very type of the Sun-god. It was a maiden's dream, not all unworthy, for never was there a nobler, more honest man, the light of truth shining in every look; but he was no god, but a very simple, genial human being, as Lusindora was soon to see.

The wooden towers of Caer Glau now were visible in the distance. Never had the girl made even this short journey of some sixteen miles. All was new to her, and she dimly felt it was the beginning of a new life. As they approached they were aware of many persons on the shore; and then a shout of

welcome came faintly on the breeze. Then a herald of this welcome floated by in a wreath of flowers, which clung lovingly by happy chance around the leader's prow ; now another garland, and another, till the water was covered with these pretty messengers, which were gathered up, and twined, dripping, around head or shoulders. The houses now began to rise on either side, standing back from the shore so as to admit a broad path, planted with trees, between them and the river. These houses, all of wood or wattled work, were still far more imposing than the huts which our little maiden knew ; and when the long stretch of the palace, with its flanking towers, and beyond, the white Roman temple to Claudius, all of stone, with shaft and peristyle, came into sight, she lost her dreaminess, and stared with wondering eyes at so much splendour. Indeed, old Gloucester, though not a tenth of its present size, was fairer then than now, set in the midst of its low wooded hills, and engarlanded with green among its very booths and quays.

As the Druids' boat stopped at the landing-place, a crowned and mantled form stepped forward to receive the priests with honour. At a glance, one could recognise a brother of Caradoc, but somewhat

less manly and commanding. This was the chief Arviragus, also a son of Cymbeline, who had summoned the party to a solemn yet jubilant festival and games. There was great hospitality that day in Caer Glau. Not only chief and warrior, but every visitor, however insignificant, was received by some one with open arms, and carried to the public tables to refresh himself after his journey.

Lusindora, quietly watching all, noticed that the aged Bran, with his thoughtful, gentle face, seemed somewhat overlooked, and he turned aside as Arviragus greeted the chief Druid, his royal brother, and the warriors. But presently, down the road leading from the palace stepped quickly a lady and a young girl.

The lady was in mourning robe and veil, and Lusindora's eyes were at once riveted on her face and form. Her figure was slender and graceful, her movements free, but modest, as if she were never thinking of herself. Her face was of a perfect oval, with soft grey hair, but young sweet eyes and smile.

"O how lovely!" cried Lusindora beneath her breath. The girl she noticed less, for her looks were fixed on the lady; but the girl was somewhat like her, and the love in her eyes made up for the

want of that infinite sweetness which nothing but sorrow nobly borne can give.

The girl left the lady's hand, and ran to the aged Bran, encircling his arm with hers, and laying her head fondly against it.

"What! my little Eigen," he said gently; "and you, dear niece Imogen. You have parted from the rest of your gay company?"

"To meet you, sire," responded the Lady Imogen, bending her knee before him.

He saluted them both, and laid his hand on Eigen's head, and side by side the three passed slowly up the path to the palace like a vision of holy love.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GAMES.

—These gentle princes,
For such and so they are, these twenty years
Have I train'd up : those arts they have, as I
Could put into them.

SHAKESPEARE, *Cymbeline*, Act v. Sc. 5.

THE temple of Claudius was the first stone building seen in that part of Britain. It had been built at the charge of Arviragus by Roman masons as a compliment to the Emperor, who, in an alliance with the British chief, had given to him in marriage a Roman lady named Genuissa, allied to the blood-royal, and wonderfully beautiful.¹ The whole town of Gloucester, indeed, bore its name in honour of the Emperor, who had built a fort there, and hence it was known as the town of Claudius, or *Caer Glau* in the British tongue. The site of the earlier

¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth.

town is pointed out upon a hill above. In front of the pillared porch of the temple extended an awning of Italian silk, with a fringe of gold, and the steps were covered with a rich carpet, on which were several carved seats. Around a large open space, where is now the Cathedral Close, were raised forms for spectators, and in the centre a circle of sand enclosed by strong palings. Near the temple was a band of harpists, who amused the people with melody while awaiting the appearance of the chiefs. Lunda had had the good fortune to place herself and her young charges near the front, so that only the palings parted them from the sanded arena.

To Lusindora all was new and entrancing. Her eyes shone brightly, her colour went and came; and, in her white fur, she was observed and admired by many. Lunda had found beside her a friendly gossip, who explained all that was to be seen, as well as the difference of dialect permitted.

“You are from the hills,” she said; “you wear the skins. We have new fashions here; we all wear woven stuffs, as you see. We are glad to see you. Arviragus prizes your warriors. The warriors of the hills are braver than those of the plains, and if, as they say, there is to be war soon, brave warriors

will be very welcome. I warrant me yon lad will be a valiant man some day," looking at the handsome Lareth, who blushed like a girl, for praise was not common on the hill. "But here come the great ones. Look!—now look with all your eyes, my girl, for, go where you will, you will not see a nobler than our lady."

A loud burst of trumpets, drums, and cymbals, followed by a martial air on the harps, announced the royal party. First came Arviragus with his bride, the noble Genuissa. She was not beautiful, but a beauty: tall, well-formed, queenly, with warm Italian colouring and a rich red glow on her cheeks, and full lips; a strongly-cut aquiline nose, and a haughty curve of nostril and upper lip; bright eyes under pencilled eyebrows, and black hair, formed by the handmaid's art into a mass of tiny curls, crowned with a jewelled tiara. A white robe, edged and fringed with gold, a crimson mantle clasped by a ruby, a richly jewelled necklace, adorned her form. She was one of those women framed to command, conscious of beauty and proud of it, but with a simple consciousness. They are among women as the damask rose or tulip in the garden,—the acknowledged queens, hardly

exciting jealousy. Lusindora's glance did not light up for her as for Imogen, however.

Behind, leaning on the arm of Caradoc, came an elder lady, attired in rich embroideries. She was small and fair, and her hair, dressed like Genuissa's, was powdered with gold dust, so that the grey hairs did not appear. But she could not hide the wrinkles in her face. She, too, wore the coronet of a queen. Her features were sharp and small; her eyes, of an almond shape, were half closed with an affected languor as she turned them with a smile on Caradoc, who was speaking. But Lusindora caught the cold gleam beneath her lashes, and shuddered.

"Who is that fair woman?" asked the girl of her friendly neighbour with a jealous sharpness.

"That is Cartismandua, Queen of the Brigantes, who dwell between the Humber and the Tyne. She is mother to the wife of Caradoc—a noble lady indeed."

Behind came Bran, the Lady Imogen, and Eigen, and the instinctive shrinking passed from Lusindora's soul as she gazed on those gentle faces.

The child's was a poetic spirit. Bred apart from cities, with an inborn truth derived from her parents, her instincts were pure and sudden, and she knew guilt at a touch.

The great ones took their places, but all stood, till Ungetorix, walking alone, passed solemnly through their midst and assumed his seat.

Then into the arena entered, with shout and tumult, a body of wrestlers, who rushed around the lists with a step not unlike the war-dance of the Northern Indian. They ranked themselves one against the other, and the struggle began. The stern grapple of force with force, the bronzed and brawny limbs, straining with the mastery of will, enthralled Lusindora while they made her shudder.

The simpler-minded Lareth was thoroughly happy, and enjoyed the sight, shouting and stamping like the men around, as one brave champion or another gained a momentary advantage.

At length a gigantic savage was proclaimed the victor, and advanced to bend his knee before Genuissa, who, with approving smile, handed him a belt of copper discs beaten out with designs from the story of Hector.

Next, the racers rushed into the lists, and dazzled the sight by their giddy course a score of times around the arena. Cartismandua handed to the victor a short embroidered mantle, which, like the belt, was a gift from Rome.

The foot-racers retired before the appalling oncome of the war-chariots. The long knives, which made the wheels fearful engines of destruction in war-time, were absent. But the charioteers—standing on the fore-front of the car, lightly perched, then rushing along the pole, vaulting upon the horses, and, in an instant, in their place again—were engines of war more awful than any blade or spear. They had bewildered the Romans once, and they trusted to do it again.

Imogen bestowed a plumed helmet on him who was by acclamation declared the most skilful charioteer.

Then came the last and greatest sport—the bull-baiting. The strong fierce animal, led in by a cord through his nose-ring, pawed the earth and snorted defiance. And then began both dogs and men to plague and pester him, to turn his grand force into ridicule, and excite the coarse laughter of the populace by his wrath. Lusindora felt an indignation greater than her fear. Her nerves began to work; she could scarcely control her cries of anger.

All at once, in his fury, the beast turned upon the paling near which she stood, and with his horns rent a part of it asunder. Less fearful than excited

beyond herself, Lusindora sprang, like a wild deer as she was, into the arena itself, and, rushing across to the only one whom she recognised as a natural protector, she laid her hand upon the pole in front of Caradoc, vaulted over it, and fell on her knees before him, crying—

“O sire, spare the poor beast! Do not let them insult him!”

A shout of laughter and applause greeted this action, and the words “Barbarian!” “Hill-woman!” were freely interchanged. The two Queens laughed lightly, but Imogen laid her hand gently on the girl’s arm, and drew her towards her, and Caradoc said, with a genial smile—

“Why, my young priestess! Methinks I saw you by the ‘King and Queen’ yester even. Stay here if you are frightened; the Lady Imogen will take good care of you.”

The girl, overcome by her untrained emotion, remained on her knees, with her face buried in the Lady Imogen’s robe, and the lady’s hand gently caressing her with a soothing motion. All eyes were fixed on the arena, and no one noticed the girl, till Imogen said gently—

“You may look up now, my child; it is over.”

The poor baited animal was gone, and traces of blood on the sand were the only signs of the conflict. All the human competitors were drawn up in the arena, and saluting their chiefs. Boys passed round bearing refreshments, and there was a pause. Genuissa's glance fell on Lusindora, and rested on her; and at last she said in the Latin tongue, of which the girl knew a few words, it being constantly used in the army—

“Stand up, maiden. You are handsome. Are you from the hills?”

“From the fort on Bredon Hill, my lady,” answered the girl in a low voice.

“Have you parents?”

She hesitated, coloured deeply, and then said, “No.”

“Can you sew? Can you dance? Can you sing?”

“None of these can I do well, lady.”

“Well, you shall be my maid. I have a fancy for a maid from wild Britain. You shall learn all these things.”

Lusindora flushed again, but a puzzled look came in her eyes. She could not believe she heard aright. Imogen explained to her, and watched with interest

the variety of emotions which chased each other over her face. None of them revealed any great delight, or even willingness. But the Lady Genuissa was not accustomed to consider the effect of her commands, and her attention was already turned to another quarter.

“With whom do you live, maiden?” asked Imogen in the British tongue.

“With Vardex, captain of the fort. He is good to me. I keep his house. He took me when my father and mother were—sent away,” she added very low.

The lady saw there was a mystery, and said no more.

“We must ask Vardex for leave to obey the command of the Lady Genuissa. Have you no one in place of a mother?”

“Old Lunda, below there,” answered the girl, pointing to where the old woman and Lareth were eagerly watching.

“You will learn much with the Lady Genuissa, and, if I am near, I will befriend you,” said the lady, with so sweet a smile that the very hope of being near her shed new light on the prospect.

At this moment silence was proclaimed by trum-

pet-peal. Arviragus rose to address the people. His manner was blunt and plain, and he even seemed embarrassed by the general gaze turned on him.

“Friends,” he said, “you are welcome—welcome to the sports, welcome to our table. We go hence to the feast, and I would have you eat and drink at will. The sports have given us satisfaction, for they show we have brave men. I was bred up in the woods, as some may know,—stolen from my father Cymbeline, and, with my brother Guiderius, brought up to hunt rather than to face a multitude.¹ I cannot speak like our orators; but I can bid ye welcome, and I can fight. We may have to fight ere long. Who has not heard how we routed Claudius at Caerperis,² when the traitor Hamo killed my brother, and I, putting on his helmet, led the men to victory, so that they knew not their leader was dead? I might have taken Claudius as he fled, but that I pursued the murderer Hamo,³ and slew him, and avenged my brother. What we have done once we may do again. True, I have no ill-will against Claudius. Did he not offer peace when

¹ Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*.

² Porchester.

³ Geoffrey of Monmouth, iv. 15.

after that he held me besieged in Winchester, with the promise of this my beautiful and well-loved bride? And my people persuaded me that tribute to the Romans was no disgrace nor subjection. For Britons will cheerfully bear the burden of a tax if there be no oppression; but oppression we will not bear.¹ And of late we have grown impatient, and you have chosen Caradoc my brother for your leader. Come what may, be firm, my people, and thankful there are such stout limbs among you as we have seen to-day."

Perhaps the Lady Genuissa understood somewhat of the British tongue, for a cloud had gathered on her brow, and, ere her husband had well ended, she rose, folded around her her costly mantle, and turned to go, the company breaking up with loud acclamations.

¹ Tacitus, *Agricola*, c. 13.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE PALACE.

I may look back on every sorrow past,
And meet life's peaceful evening with a smile,
As some lone bird at day's departing hour
Sings in the sunbeam of the transient shower,
Forgetful, though its wings are wet the while.

BOWLES.

THE palace at Caer Glau, plain though it was, seemed a miracle of luxury to Lusindora, as she followed Genuissa into her apartment. An imperious sign had bidden her to leave the circus with her new mistress, and in answer to her distressed look the Lady Imogen had kindly said—

“Go now to the palace. I will tell Lunda, and I shall see you shortly.”

The palace was built in British fashion, but furnished as much as possible like a house in Rome. True, the beauty of the central hall or *atrium*, with its fountain and flowers, which gave such elegance to a Roman dwelling of wealth, was wanting here ;

but indeed the cold and misty climate would hardly have allowed of the arrangements of Italy. Rushes and sweet herbs were strewn upon the floor, giving forth a pleasant odour as the ladies' feet pressed them; the wooden walls were hung with embroidered linen as a dado; the couches, chairs, and lamps were of Roman manufacture, and a small altar bore a statue of Ceres, Genuissa's chosen deity, and, under another name, a favourite goddess of the Britons.

A negro page, gorgeously dressed in yellow silk with a golden fringe, lifted the curtain to admit his mistress and her companions. Two handsome Roman girls advanced to take the mantles from their mistress and from Cartismandua, who threw themselves on the couches, and, at a sign, were served by the negro page with fruit and cakes on a silver tray. Lusindora stood hesitating near the door, well stared at by the Roman maidens, and apparently forgotten by Genuissa, who began an eager conversation with her companion, in which the words "Claudius," "Roman army," and "Arviragus" were alone understood by the British girl. The Queen seemed excited, and Cartismandua's replies, though in the gentlest of tones, did not

appease her. At last the elder Queen drew near to Genuissa, as if to speak in secret, and glanced towards the servants. Carelessly raising her eyes, Genuissa waved her hand to them to depart, and then, noticing her new acquisition, she added a command to take Lusindora and treat her well. The girl followed them into a large hall, where scores of servants were eating, cooking, talking, listening to a wandering bard—all in a bewildering confusion. Some of them came up with curiosity, more or less good-humoured. The black slave tried some sly pranks, pulling the fur of the girl's tunic or the flowing tresses of her hair; but Lusindora was too much embarrassed to understand or to play, and by and by she was left alone, watching the bustle and listening to the harpist, till she almost fell into a doze in the deep window where she sat retired.

She was roused by a gentle touch on her arm, and, looking up, saw the girl called Eigen, who smiled upon her, and said kindly—

“Come to the Lady Imogen.”

She rose, and followed gladly into a small chamber, furnished in the simple British mode, where the Lady Imogen sat, lovelier than ever, her mourn-

ing veil thrown by, and her long and luxuriant though grey hair being combed and arranged by a British girl, golden-haired and blue-eyed. She signed to Lusindora to seat herself on a stool at her feet, and said—

“You feel strange and lonely, I warrant, in this great house, my child?”

“Yes, madam. Must I stay indeed? I can be of no use, and they stare and laugh at me.”

“They will soon cease to do that, little one; and I have spoken to your friends. Lunda said it would be a great thing for you, and she brought Vardex to me. He said he should miss his little maid, but that he knew you were now too old for the life of a wild camp, and it is right you should learn women’s ways from women. But we must ask leave of the Arch-Druid, he said, as he has a special interest in you.”

The girl’s face assumed an expression of sullen dislike.

“So I spoke to him too,” continued the lady, “and he too is willing for you to learn courtly ways. He said you were no common handmaid; and I told him I would befriend you, and would speak a word to the Lady Genuissa that you should be near her

person. He added that he *lent* you only, for, when of age, the goddess Duw-Ion might claim your services."

"I will never go back to be near Ungetorix," muttered the girl.

Imogen laid her hand heavily on her shoulder in sign of caution, and went on—

"Now, enough. My toilette is complete for the feast; and you must make one too, as simple as my own. Fresh water and this good maid's care will refresh you, and restore these thick locks to order."

The two girls left the apartment, and were soon busied in preparing for the feast.

"My name is Morgen," said the rosy girl. "Where do you get your Roman-sounding name, you who come from a wilder part than I?"

"My parents had a friend, a Roman lady—Claudia,—and they chose the name together."

"My mistress, too, knew Claudia, and loved her," said the girl; "and she, like every one, loved my mistress."

"Oh, she is dear and sweet," cried Lusindora, clasping her hands in a rapture of affection; "I have given my heart to her at once. But why does she look so sad, and wear mourning, where all is gay?"

“The Lady Imogen has had great sorrow. My mother was her nurse, and told me all. Her step-mother hated her, and a bad man spoke evil of her, and turned the heart of her husband against her. They went near to kill her among them, but the gods brought her through, and she had a short time of wedded happiness—but oh! too short—before her beloved husband died. Now she is all alone.”

“Who, then, is the younger lady whom you call Eigen?”

“She is Caradoc’s daughter, too gentle and weakly for the life on Caer Caradoc, where the chief has his home. She is as one with the Lady Imogen—and the old man Bran (Brennus, the Romans call him), Cymbeline’s brother, is gentle like them; they form a spot of sunshine and peace wherever they are. The other ladies are proud and gay, and often harsh. But from Imogen and Eigen we have none but gentle words. It makes my blood boil at times to see the dear lady as nothing in her brother’s house; yet she is happier than Genuissa with all her jewels.”

At this moment a loud clang was struck upon a bell to announce the assembly for the feast. The girls hastened to complete their dress by a wreath

of flowers—a pretty custom imported by Genuissa from Rome ; and then each found her place behind her own mistress in the procession to the great hall. The people were thronging in. Mixed odours of sweet herbs and of the meats with which servants were loading the tables began already to fill the room ; the ladies and their attendants appeared upon the raised platform at the upper end, and the chiefs and honoured guests were there too. All went merrily. There was plenty of food and drink. Harpers made music while the people feasted, and trumpeters announced each great dish as it appeared.

When the mead and wine had begun to take effect, and the noise and steam became oppressive, the Lady Genuissa rose, and proudly saluting the company, who rose and cheered her, she withdrew, followed by the other ladies and the female attendants. She stopped for a few moments in a vestibule outside to breathe the fresh air, and a ringing shout within caught her ear.

“What is that ?” she asked.

“The first wassail¹ draught,” answered Cartismandua.

¹ The writer is aware this is a Saxon word, but uses it as a synonym for the British *toast*, whatever that may have been.

“Who gave it? To what are they drinking?” asked Genuissa eagerly.

“I know, my lady,” said one of her maidens, pushing forward; “I was beside the doorway and I heard. Caradoc gave a wassail to the freedom of the Silures and their allies.”

With a sudden cloud on her brow, the lady swept towards her own apartment. She did not speak for a long space, and the silence was broken only by Cartismandua’s soothing murmurs. At last she said, with her lips set and her eyes gleaming—

“There will be war anon. Claudius will not bear this insolence. Left alone, Arviragus would pay the tribute, and be reasonable. I will not stay to countenance a war with my own country. I will go to Rome as soon as my galley can be prepared.”

Her words created intense excitement. A gleam of satisfaction shone in Cartismandua’s eyes, and the handmaidens rejoiced at the hope of seeing the great city. But Imogen, pale but firm, approached the couch where Genuissa lay, and in a sweet clear voice said—

“You will not go when war threatens your husband, sister?—it will show like fear.”

Genuissa laughed scornfully. "Fear!—They may say what they like of the Roman princess who never knew fear. Truly the words of these savage Britons are but idle breath to me."

"They are your husband's people," said Imogen.

"Yes, and yours ; and so you think well of them. It is not fear, Imogen, but pride, that takes me home, and anger that Caradoc should mislead my husband from his allegiance. It is an honour to be allied to Rome—an honour too great for these savages ; and I will not give them my presence when they cast it away."

Imogen reseated herself in silence. Genuissa's bracelet had become unclasped as she waved her hand with a proud dismissal of the subject. It fell off, and rolled to the feet of Lusindora, who took it up, and carried it to the Princess. As she clasped it, she said—

"Thanks, child. What shall I do with you? You are too wild for Rome, and not yet trained to my ways."

Imogen was about to speak, when Genuissa continued—

"Cartismandua, will you take the child till my return, and train her for me?"

The lady consented carelessly, and the talk went on concerning the sudden preparations for the journey. No one heeded the lowering brow of the British girl, her hot cheeks, and the tears that filled her eyes. Why was she to be bandied about like a ball from one to another of these great ladies? She was no toy, no slave, but a free-born Briton. And why—oh why?—was she not to be with the lovely and loving Imogen instead of the evil-eyed Queen of the Brigantes?

CHAPTER VIII.

A FAITHFUL FRIEND.

For me, I am the mistress of my fate,
And with my trespass never will dispense,
Till life to death acquit my forced offence.

SHAKESPEARE.

LARETH alone was inconsolable at the change in Lusindora's condition. Lunda openly rejoiced, and boasted that her nursling would be near the great court ladies. Vardex, though there was unwonted tenderness on his rugged face, told the girl that it was well she should be in a place of safety, for there would soon be war.

"Look you, child," said he, drawing her into the recess of a window, and speaking in a low tone, although they were alone, for fear of being overheard; "if you are to be at the court, it is well you should know how things stand. I often thought you older than your years, and you have sense to see we are now in a difficult position. Ostorius

Scapula, whom Claudius Cæsar sent from Rome, is a brave leader, and has had success against our tribes. He has subdued the Iceni, who were ever free till now ; he put down the rising of the Brigantes in the north, though it is said yon Cartis-mandua, their Queen, is meditating some shrewd counsel ; it may be treacherous, for I mislike the look in her eye—(“ So do I, father,” interrupted the girl) ;—she wishes either to overcome them or to stand well with them. And now it is our turn to try our strength with them. Under Caradoc, we will fight our best, though it irks me sore to have a leader not of our own tribes, one of the fair-haired race. Is there none of the Silures able and brave enough to lead his own tribe ?” The old man drew himself up, for it was his conviction that *he* might well have been the man had the people’s choice but fallen on him. “ Well, we will fight,” he went on, with a deep sigh, for he was loyal, and would stand to his leader ; “ and I pray the gods we may cut off the power of these proud Romans here in our western wilds. Caradoc has held the field against Aulus Plautius, the last Roman general, and he may do so now. But somehow I have a kind of fear about me. There is weakness in Arviragus ; his Queen is a

Roman at heart as well as by birth, and she has power over him. His love for his brother Caradoc, his pride in the fame of their brave father Cymbeline, can hardly keep him true to Britain; and there is Cartismandua—you are going to her. *Keep an eye on her, girl.* Do not be led into her counsels. If she bids you carry secret messages, be not betrayed into disloyalty against your will. You would fain have been with the gentle Lady Imogen, and I would so too, but you may be safer further away from the field of battle. The storm will break here, over our very heads. Now farewell, my maid. You have been kind to the old soldier, and the gods will reward you.” He gave her a hasty caress, as if ashamed of his weakness, and turned away, drawing his hand across his eyes.

A more awful visit was that from Ungetorix. Lusindora had so urgently begged not to be left alone with him that the interview took place in the presence of Imogen. It was short. The priest bade her use every occasion of study, and of learning the arts and manners of courts. “Under Caradoc,” he said, “we shall be invincible, and the gods whom the Britons have served so faithfully will not desert them. A new day will arise for us when the priest

will be the leader, and arts and education will spread through his means. Therefore must those who are in sacred offices be wise and cultured. But," he added, turning to Imogen, "let not the court think to retain this maiden, for a higher call will be hers when she comes to woman's estate. I have cast her horoscope, and the stars declare, 'Lusindora shall unite herself to the true Divine.' Therefore she is not her own, nor another's, but *ours*."

His keen eye rested on her with a glance of possession. The girl stood with downcast head, her abundant tresses hiding her face, and not even to Imogen did she betray any emotion. But when Lareth came to bid her good-bye, his lip quivering, scarcely repressed tears in his eyes, she whispered to him—

"Lareth, I must see you alone. Meet me to-night, when the ladies of the court are at supper, by the landing-place on the river."

They met. It was a gloomy evening; dark clouds obscured the sunset; heavy drops were falling. Lusindora, clad already in the woven garb of the townsfolk, drew her scarf about her, and said—

"Let us go where we shall not be seen."

Hastily moving along the river-side, they came to

a clump of willows, which hid them from view. Here her silence and reserve fell off, and, throwing herself on the ground, she burst into a passion of tears and deep sobs. Lareth knelt beside her, caressing her hand, and soothing her with loving words.

“Parted, parted!” she groaned, and for a time she could say no more. At length, by a sudden effort, she sat up, dashed the tears from her eyes, and spoke impetuously, in a voice at first husky, but afterwards clear, though subdued—

“A new life is beginning for me, Lareth. All the happiness in the old fort on Bredon Hill is passed away. Our games at Lunda’s feet; our lessons, which were dear because we shared them, though they were given by Ungetorix,—all are gone; and I have said farewell to Vardex. War is coming, and I shall never be the same again, nor ever live on Bredon Hill. I feel it. I have to bind down my nature, and tame myself—for they shall not tame me; I will save them the trouble,” she added proudly.

“They will be kind to you, never fear; they cannot help it,” said Lareth.

“I care not if they are kind. I could love Imogen

and Eigen, but for Cartismandua and Genuissa, it is all one to me if they are kind or not. I fear no one. But one thing I fear, and one thing I desire; and those two things you must undertake for me. Will you, Lareth? Will you serve your old friend faithfully?"

"I will, if it cost my life. O come back with us, Lusindora; fly from this strange place, and we will defend you with our lives if the enemy comes to our fort. But who dare fear in the trenches on Bredon Hill?"

"No, Lareth, I will not return; Vardex bids me stay. The gods will it so. But for your promise: will you serve me?"

"Faithfully I will."

"Swear it, Lareth—swear by the King and Queen that you will do the two things Lusindora shall bid you."

Lareth hesitated a moment. The oath by the King and Queen was an awful oath, solemn and binding to the death, and it had never passed his lips.

"Tell me what I am to promise," he faltered.

"What! you hesitate! You would refuse my last request? Nay, then—"

She turned to go. He could not withstand, and caught her hand eagerly—

“ I swear, Lusindora ; I swear by the King and Queen to do your bidding.”

She turned to him with a radiant yet solemn smile : “ I thank you, dear friend. The things I ask will cost you much, perchance ; but I would do them for you, and you will do them for me. The first is— Do you know where my father is, Lareth ?”

Never before had she uttered her father’s name in his hearing.

“ Your father ?” he stammered.

“ Yes ; my father, Rargon ; my good, pious, persecuted father.”

“ *Pious ?*” he repeated.

“ Yes, pious,—more pious than those who exile him ; for he knows the gods love, and do not hate.”

“ But he is dead, Lusindora, in the forest.”

“ He is not dead, Lareth, nor is my mother. They live, but my mother is sick, and they suffer untold misery. *For my sake*, Lareth, you will go to the western wall of the fort each evening at sundown, before the men return from chase or exercise, and listen if you hear a low call, as from a quail. Then answer by the evening hymn to the King of Day.

Rargon will appear. If he draws back on seeing you, speak my name softly; and, when he is close below the wall, so that you can whisper to him, tell him where I am, and that, if he and my mother can follow to the neighbourhood of Cartismandua's court, we can meet there, and perchance, so far from the home of Ungetorix—though, is he not everywhere?—they may come forth as humble travellers, and be free.”

“That is one duty. I will fulfil it,” answered the lad.

Lusindora caught his hand, and carried it passionately to her lips.

“It is a gift of your life if the Druid should see you; but be cautious, be cautious, Lareth, for you must live to do my other behest.”

“And what is that?” asked the lad, red with the feeling awakened by her action.

Lusindora drew from beneath her scarf a tiny jewelled dagger, and put it in his hand.

“Hide this, hide it very carefully. It is very precious. It is one of Genuissa's daggers. The great ladies prick their handmaids with them when they are displeased. But it can kill as well as prick. You are to keep it for me, and you are to plunge it

in my heart—yes, to the hilt—if ever Ungetorix claims me and takes me for a priestess.”

The lad turned pale, and shrank back. He would not take the dagger.

“Take it, take it, Lareth,” she commanded; “remember you have sworn by the King and Queen.”

“But to kill *you*, and to rob the gods of a priestess! O Lusindora, what vengeance would follow me into the next world! I fear it. Think of it: our souls cast by the Druid’s wrath into some noxious reptile, never, perhaps, to enter the homes of the blessed!”

“Lareth, it may never be. But if it is, you would save the ruin of me, body and soul, by slaying me with your own kind hand. Never, *never* will I be the creature of Ungetorix! But they would not let me keep the dagger. Hide it well; wrap it in waxen cloth, and bury it beneath the King and Queen if you will; and if ever the day comes, remember your vow, and fetch it.”

Reluctantly he took it. Steps were heard.

“Farewell, Lareth; dear Lareth,” she murmured, and, casting her arms about his neck, she kissed him repeatedly, and fled away, leaving him half dazed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAGED HERO.

The light and lustrous curls,
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne, were parch'd with dust,
Or clotted into points, and, hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.

TENNYSON, *Morte d'Arthur*.

FOR some seven days more the court remained at, Caer Glau, and the two Queens, occupied with preparations for departure with defter handmaidens, willingly left Lusindora with Imogen, who taught her many gentle and maidenly ways, judging that little personal interest would be taken in her by Cartismandua. It was a happy time. Lusindora sat sewing, or otherwise usefully busied, in Imogen's simple room, where no visitors came but Bran and Caradoc. The arrival of the latter was like a broad gleam of sunshine, so genial, kind, and strong was he, with ever a good word for Lusindora, though

she shrank when he called her his "young priestess." Once he gave her a golden Roman coin. She bored a hole in it, and wore it round her neck. She felt a devoted and romantic loyalty for this great champion of her race.

On the evening before Cartismandua was to depart, Imogen, Eigen, and Bran were united, Lusindora only attending them.

"Beloved uncle," began Imogen, "I have been thinking much of the coming struggle; if what they say of the preparations of Ostorius Scapula be true, it will be a hard one. Were it not safer for you and Eigen to go with the Queen of the Brigantes? She has been subdued by the Romans, and now it seems to me (though I do not venture to say I understand her) that she desires to stand well with them. We must spare your white hairs, honoured friend," she added, taking his hand with a tender smile.

Caressing hers, he answered benignly—

"Dear Imogen, at my age there is no such thing as fear, and it seems to me that my place and that of this child is with her parents on *Caer Caradoc*. If there is danger, we should share it; but nowhere, methinks, is there less than where the strong arm

and brave heart of Caradoc protect us. What say you, Eigen ?”

“My wish is yours, beloved grandsire,” answered the girl; “I would not be parted from my parents in danger, but neither would I wish to be parted from my sweet aunt Imogen. Will she not come with us ?”

“No, dear one ; I stay with Arviragus. He was by me in my bitterest need, and now (his beloved wife among his enemies) he will feel sad, and perhaps weak of heart. There is danger everywhere ; but little, methinks, to fear.”

“Yet danger should be wisely met, not ignored,” said the aged Bran. “Before we part, let us join in one prayer to the great God, Claudia’s God.”

He stood up solemnly. Imogen glanced inquiringly at Lusindora ; but he made a reassuring sign, and they all stood while he uttered the words—

“O Thou Who art the Author of life and wisdom, Whom, knowing not, we worship, vouchsafe to guide and protect us and ours in the coming strife ; and, come what may, preserve us from disgrace and sin.”

That evening Lusindora was alone with Imogen, and she at once eagerly asked—

“Who was the God to whom Bran prayed ?”

“My child,” answered Imogen, “since Bran thought fit to trust in you, you will keep this secret, for, known to the Druids, it might cost him and us our lives.”

“O lady, you may trust me, indeed. But say, who is this God?”

“We do not know, Lusindora; we know but little. Once, some years since, when Aulus Plautius was governor in Britain, a young officer of his, named Pudens, married a British lady, born in *Caer Glau*, named *Claudia*—”¹

“My mother’s friend,” interrupted the girl.

“Was it so, indeed? We saw that there was in Pudens and his wife something different from others,—they seemed not for this world, purer and humbler; and once in private *Claudia* told us that they had found joy and peace in the knowledge Pudens had gained from a teacher in *Gaul*, the certain knowledge that there is but one God, who is called *Love*; and that He made all men, and loves them, and sent His only Son to show them the way to the Home of Bliss, not through the bodies of lower animals, as the Druids teach. But further she

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 21. *Claudia* is believed to have been a native of Gloucester.

had no time to tell us, and we treasure her words, and ever look for some teacher to tell us more.

“And your mother knew Claudia,” continued Imogen, ever sympathetic. “Were you old enough to know your mother when she died?”

“My mother is not dead, lady,” said Lusindora in a low voice.

“Not dead, dear child? then why—” She hesitated.

“Lady, you have trusted the British girl, and I may trust you. My parents are outcasts, because they could not believe in the cruel gods of the Druids, and because my father opposed the human sacrifice. Men think them dead, but I have seen them in secret. They live in misery in the forest, and my mother is sick. Is it a wonder that I hate Ungetorix, or that I would fain hear of a God such as my father can believe in?”

“Indeed, no wonder, my child; but be silent. Your secret is safe with me; but trust not Cartismandua, or any other being. A heedless word, even a look, and you would share your parents’ fate whereas now you may yet live to aid them—who knows? Hush! some one is approaching.”

These were the last words Imogen said to the

girl in private, and on the morrow she was carried in the train of Cartismandua to the land of the Brigantes, between the Humber and the Tyne.

This noted Queen, holding sway over the hordes of two races, united in the name of *Brigantes* or Mountaineers, had first opposed the Roman arms. But, being subdued, she was eager to keep her own proud position as Queen of the largest territory in Britain, and knew she could only do so by proving herself a staunch ally of Rome. Her castle at Caer Evrauc (now York) was well known to the conquerors, and known among them as "*Altera Roma*" (the other Rome). Eboracum, the Latinised form of Evrauc, was the great resting-place of the Emperors on their visits to this island.

The court of Cartismandua was ruder, yet more gorgeous than that of Arviragus. Her barbarian subjects could only be held subdued by force, mingled with amusements which appealed to their lower nature. It was a boisterous but unhappy home, for Cartismandua, parted from her own husband Venusius, and at constant war with him, was ever eager to gain his partisans to her side, and to prevent hers going over to him. Thus in the hall there was ever-flowing mead, and food in rough

plenty ; dancing and games went on daily ; open house was kept for all comers, and in the state-rooms was an imitation of Roman elegance—for it was to the Romans Cartismandua looked to uphold her power, and in everything she would fain show her love for them.

Lusindora might have joined with the other handmaids in their often unseemly games, but for the wise counsels she had received from Imogen, and for the remembrance of her parents, high-born and high-souled, and in great suffering. Daily she watched for some sign that they had received and acted on the message sent by Lareth ; and at every spare moment, when the rest were at their sports, she would wander alone in forest paths or on high ground, whence she could see those approaching the castle. There she would watch every shadow, listen for every sound, in hopes of hearing the well-known quail-call, and seeing the dear features of Rargon under some disguise.

Anxiety for Lareth and Vardex also quickened her senses when any message of the progress of the war was brought to her royal mistress. By Imogen's advice, Lusindora made herself useful about the Queen, so as to keep near her person, and learn

courtly manners ; and it was there, too, that she hoped to hear of the serious events of the time. With strong self-control, she forced her fingers to be deft and gentle in combing her lady's locks or in embroidering her garments. So rapidly did she learn, that it was a marvel to her careless companions, who took advantage of the state of the idle court to neglect their duties. The Queen found that she was better and more gently served by Lusindora than by others ; and thus the girl, with her head bent over her work, her face shaded by her dark hair, would listen to every word from the messengers who were constantly bringing reports to Cartismandua. At first their words, whether in the Roman tongue or in the dialect of the Brigantes, were scarcely intelligible to her ; but with the same energy she set herself to learn, and she soon was able to gain the knowledge she wished, while her mistress believed her to understand no dialect but that of the Silures.

First she heard that Caractacus (as here he was always called) had left *Caer Glau*, and fortified himself in the country of the *Ordovices* on *Caer Caradoc*, a fortress on a hill, in what is now called *Shropshire*, near the rivers *Clune* and *Teind*.

Here his family were with him. The sides of the hill were defended by ramparts of loose piled-up stones, and he had many men to defend the British cause. All were confident that his success, which had held good nine years, would continue, and perhaps the Roman power be broken.

Cartismandua listened with a smile, and "May the gods grant it!" fervently breathed; but Lusindora caught the falseness in her tone, and found her gloomy and captious when alone.

For some days it was the same. Caradoc would not hazard a battle; he would let the Romans attack him in his trenches. Then at last, the Roman army were surrounding him, Ostorius himself at their head. The other British chiefs demanded battle.

For two days no more news arrived, and Cartismandua was in a state of the highest excitement. Like a caged tigress she paced her chamber, her thin hands working or clenched, unable to eat or sleep; and Lusindora, though forced to be quiet, felt little less.

On the third day an attendant came in hurriedly, announcing a messenger. In an instant Cartismandua was herself, seated on her chair of state, and calmly awaiting the envoy. He came in hot

haste, dishevelled, and even blood-stained. He craved pardon humbly for so unseemly an appearance, but the Queen replied—"News of battle dispenses from ceremony. Your story, messenger!"

"Lady," he said, "they were all assembled, Arviragus and the rest; and he was the keenest for a battle. Caractacus would have held in the trenches to the last. But since Genuissa left him, they say Arviragus is all on fire for the honour of Britain, as if fighting for duty against his love. Caractacus yielded to the rest, and chose a post on the slope of the hill, where the river protected his troops, being there hard to ford. Moreover, he made ramparts and trenches. Then the chieftains exhorted their men to valour; but *he* was everywhere at once, or so it seemed. He flew from rank to rank, protesting that from that day, that battle, they would have to date the recovery of liberty or the commencement of interminable bondage. He invoked our ancestors, who had repulsed the Dictator Cæsar, by whose valour we have lived exempt from the terrors of Roman axes, and the oppression of Roman tributes, and were enabled to keep the persons of our wives and children unharmed."¹

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, B. xii. c. 34.

“Yes, yes,” said Cartismandua; “Caractacus is ever brave; but *is he victorious?*”

She spoke breathlessly. She could not control the eagerness of her look and attitude, as she seemed to hang on the words of the messenger. Nor was it needful to disguise, for all were eager as herself.

The messenger hung his head—

“Alas! madam, he is conquered.”

Cartismandua drew a long breath. Was it of pain, or of relief?

“Tell me how it befell,” she said.

“The Romans seemed at first to hesitate. They say that Ostorius shrank from sending his men against such a foe and such a position, but the Roman soldiers clamoured to be led on. Thus excited, they cleared the river. Then at the rampart our missiles told upon them, till they formed themselves into the living mass which they call *the shell*, their shields held compact over their heads, till from above it seems one huge tortoise approaching the wall; and under this shelter they succeeded in beating down the loose stones; and then began a struggle, hand to hand. The Britons retreated to their mountain ridges, the enemy followed, and our

men having neither breastplates nor helmets, while the enemy had both, were at terrible disadvantage, and were mowed down like grass. At last the enemy reached the fortress itself. Caractacus had vanished. It is thought he is dead, though no one saw him fall. Ostorius penetrated into the very chamber where the wife and daughter of Caractacus were in each other's arms, the aged Bran beside them. They are taken prisoners, and Arviragus yielded up his sword."

"Then, as Caractacus said, it is bondage—for my child, for us," gasped Cartismandua. She could hardly speak; she laid her hand upon her heart. Lusindora gave her water to drink, and deeply pitied her, and blamed herself for mistaking the heart of the Queen.

"Go, all of you," said the Queen; "I would be alone. I have to write. Give me my tablets. Let the messenger be refreshed and rewarded."

That night, when the servants were supping, with loud talk and comment on the battle, and the Queen was still alone, a knocking came at the gate, and when the steward demanded the name of the visitor, the answer came, loud and firm—

"It is I—Caradoc."

He was there, wrapped in a mantle, a settled cloud on his open brow, his golden hair matted and hanging in points. He strode towards the Queen's room, and at the door was met by Lusindora, who sat there awaiting her lady's call. She sprang up, her eyes greedily devouring the aspect of his countenance, her hands clasped, her lips parted. She threw herself on her knees, and kissed the hem of his garment.

"O joy, my lord! You are not dead!" she cried softly, but with intense feeling.

The chief smiled a sad smile, and laid his hand on her head. "Ever faithful, true heart," he said. "Take me to your lady."

For one second, as the eyes of Cartismandua fell on the face of the conquered leader, the malign serpent-flash appeared within them. But he saw it not, for he was free from guile; and when did a noble-hearted man read a woman's subtlety? He bent before her with a proud humility.

"Lady mother," said he, "I have come to implore shelter from you. I shall not ask it in vain."

"But my daughter—your wife—Caractacus; where is she?"

"Alas! in the hands of Ostorius. We are de-

feated—I hope not ruined. Give me time, and help me with men from your brave Brigantes, and I will yet bring you back your child and mine.”

“The Romans took your wife and daughter, and *not you*, Caractacus,” she said, with an emphasis of scornful sorrow.

The chief flushed, and his eye kindled.

“You know what war is, Cartismandua,—the rush, the tumult; how one is parted from another. My men were dying by the score to defend our home, while I was fighting hand to hand, near the ford, with a ring of opponents. Do you think I did not fight? Do you know me, and think I fled?”

“No, no. Calm yourself, brave chieftain,” she replied in her soft voice, laying her hand on his arm; “I know your valour; but pardon a mother who thinks you rash as well as brave, and would fain you had been defending her child,—for whose arm is like that of a husband and father?”

“I was to blame in that I did not bring them to you for safety; but who can tell where the war may rage? and who would not keep his most precious things under his own eye? Be assured, Cartismandua, the Romans will treat such prisoners with all honour; and not a day, not an hour, will I

lose till I make some effort to get men to win them back. Say, will you help me?"

"My home is yours, you know it well, Caractacus. From this moment you are master here. But I dare not promise you many fighting men. I am a lone woman, and it may be my turn next; and when my daughter is ransomed or won back, she must come here for safety. But rest and refresh you now, and we will talk anon."

"Yes; I must rest and think," answered the chief; and with another bow, he withdrew.

Lusindora, not bidden to retire, had remained during the interview in the shadow of a recess, dwelling on the chieftain's looks, and awaiting her lady's pleasure. But scarcely had he gone than, to her alarm and surprise, she saw there was a third person in the apartment. From behind the very drapery of Cartismandua's chair sprang up a youth, in the closely-girded dress of a messenger.

"Go," said the Queen softly, but imperiously; "here is your reward. Let no man see you. Tell no man your errand. If you meet them, tell them the straightest road hither."

Lithe and silent as a serpent, the messenger glided away.

Lusindora had not betrayed herself by a sound, and the Queen had not observed her; and now, to the girl's relief, Cartismandua quitted the apartment.

What was this secret? Who was this mysterious messenger, hidden from the Queen's own son-in-law? "If you meet *them*, show them the straightest road hither." Who were *they*? There was treachery in the air.

That night, when all was dark and silent in the castle, and Caractacus had thrown himself on his couch in hopes of getting some repose, a slight rustling of the curtain at his door made him spring up and lay his hand on his sword. But in a moment a gentle whisper reassured him—

"My lord, it is I, the girl of Bredon—Lusindora."

"You here, child, at this hour!"

"Hush, my lord; I pray you, not so loud. Believe me, I would not be so bold, but that I dare not wait. My lord, leave this place! O leave it, before it is too late!"

"My child," said he soothingly, and in a very soft, gentle tone, for he feared to bring severe displeasure on her were her visit discovered, "you are

frightened with the rumour of war, and perhaps bewildered with fear and anxiety for those you love. But Vardex was safe when last I saw him."

"My lord, I thank you indeed for remembering the friends of poor Lusindora; but I am not afraid nor bewildered for myself—it is for you I fear."

"If the Romans should come here, we could hold out against them, child. Go and sleep; danger is no further off when we dread it than when we sleep secure."

"O my lord," she almost cried, drawing a little nearer in her urgency, "will you not understand me? You are not safe here, because there is treachery about you."

"Treachery! Where? how?" he uttered, now beneath his breath, from caution.

"Forgive me, and do not think me mad, Carac-tacus. It is Cartismandua herself that you have to fear."

He laughed a short laugh, half scornful, half good-humoured.

"Folly! my wife's own mother! You are weary, and know not what you say or do, child. Go back to your bed, and sleep away your dreams."

"Will you not believe me, my lord, that the

forest is a safer hold for you than this strong castle?"

There was an agony of eagerness in her voice.

"What proof do you give me?" he asked, somewhat coldly.

"I saw the gleam in her eye when you entered; and there was a secret messenger, whom no one had seen enter, hidden behind her chair while you spoke with her. I saw him depart. I was in the shadow, and she never knew I was there. She said, 'Go, let no man see you; and if you *meet them*, show them the straightest road hither.'"

There was silence. Caractacus seemed to waver, to ponder, but for a few seconds only. Then he said, in a voice which could not be disobeyed—

"Go, child; it is not seemly for you to be here. I thank you for your goodwill; but I know the Queen, and trust her."

No one in that castle saw Caradoc again, nor knew how or when he had been taken.

When, after hours of sleeplessness, Lusindora fell into a heavy slumber, she was awakened by an unusual noise of talk and excitement.

"Caradoc is gone," the people were saying.

Her first thought was of joy and thankfulness: "Then he had taken her counsel, after all." But later came strange whispers, which pointed to a different conclusion. One had heard muffled steps in the night, a measured tread, as of Roman soldiers; another had heard the drawbridge creak.

In Caradoc's chamber were said to be signs of a struggle. The girl went there, and saw indeed spots of blood on the floor, a lock of hair torn from the roots, a broken belt, and a torn mantle. What did it all mean? Treachery? But Cartismandua was so alarmed, so shocked, so overcome; was it possible all this could be deceit? An agony of conflicting feelings, with the changes in her mode of life, wrought so on the girl's mind and body, that even her young barbaric strength could not stand against it, and she had to yield to a low fever, in which intense weakness took from her for some days all power of thought. An old nurse brought her potions and broths; Cartismandua herself came and looked on the sick maid once or twice, and spoke gently; and the girl was in a softened frame, anxious to believe that her chieftain had gone away of his own free will, when her eyes were suddenly enlightened.

CHAPTER X.

INTO THE DARKNESS.

Pray you, tell him
I am his fortune's vassal, and I send him
The greatness he has got. I hourly learn
A doctrine of obedience; and would gladly
Look him i' the face.

SHAKESPEARE.

LUSINDORA was hardly yet recovered, and had not been called on to perform any service for her lady, when a handmaid entered her chamber, with a look of bright expectancy, and bearing in her hand two costumes of soft, woven, embroidered wool, the one a pale red, the other white.

"Come, Lusindora," she said, "shake off your languor, and up and dress. We are all to be merry and busy, for the great Roman general will be here anon, and we are to hold festival, and wear the Roman dress to please him."

"Must I," said Lusindora, "must I wear the dress of our enemies?"

“Must you!” rejoined the other, mocking her tone; “it is not many girls who would need to be forced to wear a beautiful new dress. Were our coarse brown stuffs ever equal to this?” turning the robes to the light. “Come, now; this red suits your colour best. We must not delay. They will be here ere supper, and there is much to do.”

In truth, Lusindora, weak and slow in her movements, was hardly arrayed, when a blast was heard without, and a hasty summons came for all the Queen’s maidens to be beside her as she received her guest.

Ostorius Scapula, the new general sent from Rome to reduce Britain, and especially that obstinate chief who had resisted Aulus Plautius nine years, was a brave man, of middle age, handsome, and somewhat of a dandy. As he approached, in Roman breastplate and helmet, he looked a brave figure enough, and most courteously greeted Cartismandua, who, in her richest garb, with gilded hair, stood on her threshold to receive him.

At supper he wore the more effeminate dress of a Roman patrician, pomatumed and perfumed; and his flatteries and courtly graces, while they recommended him to the women of the Brigantes,

seemed poor to Lusindora in contrast with the simple grandeur of Caractacus. "What!" she thought, "so soon after the defeat of our great chief she can entertain and flatter his enemy. Oh! it is not true-hearted; it is not right womanly."

A great gold cup, filled with Falernian wine (another compliment to Rome, whose choice drink it was); was handed to Cartismandua. She put her lips to it, and then, handing it to Ostorius, with her sweetest smile and the most languid glance of her cold eyes, she said—

"Pledge whom you will, brave general."

"I drink," said he, with a smiling inclination towards her, "to my valiant foe, whom all brave Romans honour, and who, thanks to you, is now safe in the great city, rather than hewn to pieces by our men on British soil."

Cartismandua's colour changed, and she glanced around, as if unwilling for her attendants to hear this revelation; but, all unconscious, Ostorius went on in a lower tone—

"It was well and wisely done, madam, and your brave son-in-law may thank you for his life. Be sure Claudius will honour him, and treat him as he merits. The captivity of such a man in Rome is

worth ten free lives here. His spirit may chafe a moment at the great triumph in which he must form the chief figure, but a thousand charms will speedily make him forget that one trial. Arviragus, who is with him, will be happier still, for he will be reunited with his beautiful wife."

"When will this triumph be?" asked Cartismandua, in a constrained voice.

"So soon as I can reach Rome. And now that your kind favour, lady, assures me of friends here in the north, I may safely leave your island, and hope, with favouring winds, to be in some fourteen days in Rome itself."

Absorbed in this conversation, the Queen had not heard a low and stifled cry and a sudden movement behind her. Now she called upon Lusindora for her fan. Another came up to obey. "I called for Lusindora," she said sharply. The maiden whispered in her ear—

"The girl is ill, lady; she uttered a cry and rushed from the hall."

"Well, let her be. I fear me she is a weak thing. You may fan me in her stead."

And Lusindora, where was she? In her chamber, her Roman garb torn off, and trampled under foot,

her old barbaric rage bursting all bounds of maiden fear. Had any one come then to stop her in her action, or to force her back to the hall, she felt strong enough and wild enough to have killed that rash intruder. She sought among all her new woven garments for the old tunic of white fur, and hastily buckling it on, and drawing on her buskins with their leather thongs—feeling too that the precious coin, Caradoc's gift, was safe at her throat,—she left her room, boldly entered the cellar, where abundance of food was kept. She cared not who saw her. One stared at her strange dress, and asked what she had done with her fine new robe; but others were too busy to observe her. Snatching bread and meat, and placing it in the bosom of her dress, and in a basket which she took; wrapping herself in a large coarse mantle, which was lying there (for who could tell when or where she might find a friend or a shelter?) Lusindora opened a small side-door, leading on to the slope of the castle trench, and passed out of the light and cheer of that treacherous house alone into the darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE FOREST.

Romans, methinks the malice of your tyrants
Might furnish heavier chains.

MASON, *Caractacus*.

UNDER the thick trees in the wild and pathless wood was a little cabin of wattled work, lined with moss. A curtain of skin hung inside the door, and from a hole in the roof escaped a thin thread of smoke. Many a simple comfort was around the lowly dwelling: a paling, strong and high enough to resist the attack of wolves, a hedge of wild roses within it, even a little patch of cultivation, where green vegetables, herbs, and corn did justice to some careful inhabitant.

The curtain was lifted by a wasted hand, and a woman's face looked forth. It bore the traces of former beauty, and there was still a grace upon its delicate features, but pain and sickness had set

their mark upon it. It seemed that the woman was crippled, for she was seated near the opening, and by her was a strong crutch-like stick. The firelight within threw a gleam into the gathering twilight, and there was an odour of some savoury mess. The woman continued to hold back the heavy curtain and look out wistfully. At last she lifted her head, and listened with a smile to the sound of a step trampling down the brushwood. The bark of a dog was also heard, and presently the creature himself came leaping to the gate, shortly followed by a tall, manly, but gaunt figure, the same which had appeared to Lusindora under the wall of the camp on Bredon Hill.

“Rargon,” called the woman, in a soft sweet voice; “what success, my husband?”

“Good success, Loren,” he answered; “the wild pigeons that you love, and a few fish, too, in my basket.”

“Enough for me; but for you too scanty and unsatisfying food,” she answered, shaking her head.

“Well, wife, there is still some dried boar’s flesh, and we may entrap another of the big brutes before winter. Come, is supper ready? A search for food is hungry work.”

He bent his head to enter the lowly door. In that little room was more order than in any but the highest places of the palaces. The skins were spread invitingly, and a wooden block was prepared as a simple supper-table, with clean wooden vessels. The wife began to gather up her crutch for use, but Rargon, saying, "Sit you still, dear wife, and let me work for you," occupied himself with the preparations for their meal.

"Are you in great pain?" he asked tenderly.

"No, love; I have had the ague fit less strongly to-day, and the pains in my limbs are less violent. Oh, if I could but move to obey our dear child's loving wish!"

"How long is it since the message came? Four moons, methinks, have waxed and waned. Well, if she be happy, and well cared for, and taught, we may be content."

"It was a sweet thought of hers that we might come forth there in the northern land and be free."

Rargon shook his head. "I fear me that can never be. The Druids track their prey like sleuth-hounds, and Ungetorix will never relax his hate. Does he know we live? I often ask myself. But if

he lets us be, it is because he knows well the horrors of solitude in the forests."

"In the fair summer weather I often think with you, my Rargon, it is well to be here, apart from the rudeness of men; and if we had our child I could be happy, despite these pains."

"In truth, we need not desire to be in the world, for there is nought but war and bloodshed. Even to-day the breeze brought me a sound, which seemed like that of battle. I climbed a hillock, and saw Roman helmets gleaming."

"Methought the neat-herd told you there was quiet, and that the Roman general was gone to his own city."

"Not long will Britons be easy under a foreign yoke, or they are greatly changed since we were cast out. Oh, it is bitter to stand by, and be like an idle log while the country is struggling for her freedom!"

"Yet, methinks," answered his wife gently, "we were better under the Roman yoke than under that of the Druids. Their religion is cruel, and so are they, while that of the Romans is gentle and mild, and has no human sacrifices. It will be easier under them than under the Druids to worship the one true God of whom we heard from Claudia."

As they conversed, the pair had begun their simple meal. They were interrupted by a sound, which made Rargon start to his feet and listen.

“Methought I heard a human voice,” he said.

“Oh no, husband; some night-bird or wild animal.”

But soon it came again—a faint sound, as of a call for help. Rargon rose at once, and, taking a torch, lighted it (for the night was dark), and went out, in spite of his wife’s entreaty that he would be cautious. Presently he was heard returning, and encouraging some one, whom he led into the enclosure, and then into the cot. It was a Roman soldier, badly wounded. His handsome face was pallid, and he was evidently in great pain. Rargon had spoken to him in the Latin tongue, but to his wife he said in that of Britain—

“Although an enemy, we cannot let him die untended while there is a God of love above us. He shall have my couch, wife, and you will prepare him your healing salve and potion.”

“Surely, and quickly too, husband,” she answered, seeking in her scanty stores for the necessary dried herbs.

For the whole of that night was Rargon watching beside his guest, and tending him like a sick child;

and his wife would fain have done the same, but her husband made her rest her frail and aching form. The potion and salve were skilfully prepared, and after a feverish night of pain, the soldier slept at last a childlike sleep, from which (though not till the sun was again declining) he awoke refreshed, and ready for the appetising meal, which Loren hastened to prepare. He watched her with that pleasant languid curiosity which convalescents feel when after pain they awake to relief. He took the cup with a courteous bend of his handsome head, carefully pillowed on a roll of skins, and received the tempting morsels from her hand with murmurs of apology and thanks.

“Speak not,” she said gently, in pure and well-spoken Latin; “think your mother is tending you, and be patient.”

A look of surprise passed over his face to hear his native tongue so fairly spoken in that British cot; but nature overcame his curiosity, and he shortly slept again.

Two days’ nursing restored that vigorous frame to strength; and then he declared that necessity called on him to quit his new-found friends, nor could all their urgency prevail.

“Surely the general will spare you till you are strong,” said Loren, whose mother-love, deprived of its natural outlet, was ready to expend itself lavishly on all who needed it.

“Our friend is surely an officer, Loren,” said her husband, “and he feels they can ill spare him.”

“Duty calls, indeed,” answered the Roman; “but one circumstance makes me loath to return to my post—it is that I go to the ranks of the so-called enemies of those who have tended me so lovingly. Rome is not willingly the enemy of Britain. Why will not your rash and over-warlike islanders believe that?”

“We would believe it, if Rome kept within her borders, and left us free,” answered Rargon, with a smile.

“Rome has a mission—to spread arts and civilisation in barbarous lands,” answered the soldier proudly. “And, in truth, you would do better to believe it, for, now that Caractacus is taken—”

“Caractacus taken!” cried both, dismayed.

The Roman stared.

“You are Britons, and know not that?”

“We have no intercourse with our fellows,” answered Rargon gloomily; “we know nothing.

We are under the ban of the Druids, and they are all-powerful in Britain."

"Too powerful," rejoined the other. "Rome will never be at ease about Britain till that fierce and proud race of priests is destroyed; and if I have a chance to rid her of them, I will not fail. But why, if you are cast out by your own people, do you not join us? If I mistake not, you are of better birth and breeding than the common herd. You would find good comrades in our ranks, and your gentle wife would have those comforts which her health requires."

"Never a traitor," answered Rargon firmly, though gloomily; and his wife pressed his hand with a smile.

"Ah, well," answered the Roman, "a time may soon come when you will be no traitor to your own tribe by allying yourself with Rome. But for your brave though wrong-headed Caractacus, your Silures and Ordovices would have been our allies, like the tribes along the coast."

"Tell us of Caractacus," said Loren; "where is he?"

"In Rome. He has made part of a great triumph. He was the observed of all, for all longed to behold

the man who for so many years had defied the Roman arms. The people were summoned to see him as a rare spectacle, and the Prætorian bands stood under arms in the field before their camp. First, the servants and followers of the British chief moved in procession ; and the trappings and colours and all he had taken in wars with his neighbours, were borne along ; next came his brother and uncle, his wife and daughter, and last himself, attracting the gaze of all. All the rest descended to supplications ; the old man Bran seemed moved to tears for his grandchild, the daughter of Caractacus, lest she should be left to languish in a prison. But he, disdainng to solicit compassion, as soon as he was placed before the Imperial tribunal, thus spoke : ‘ If my moderation in prosperity had been as great as my lineage was noble, and my successes brilliant, I should have entered this city as a friend rather than as a captive ; nor could you then have disdained to receive a prince, descended from illustrious ancestors and the ruler of many nations, into terms of alliance. My present lot, as it is to me ignominious and degrading, so is it a matter of glory and triumph to you. I had men and arms, horses and riches. Where is the wonder if I was unwilling

to part with them? If you Romans aim at extending your dominion over all mankind, it does not follow that all men should take the yoke upon them. Had I at once been delivered into your hands, a prisoner at discretion, neither had my fall nor your glory been thus signal. If you inflict punishment upon me, the affair will sink into oblivion; but if you preserve my life, I shall form an imperishable record of your clemency.' Claudius was so struck by the noble mind and manners of the hero, that he pardoned him and his family."¹

"But how came he to be taken alive?" asked Rargon. "Was there treachery at work?"

"Treachery is a hard word," said the Roman. "Cartismandua, knowing his cause to be hopeless, and that he would obtain good treatment at our hands, judged wisely for him—"

"Cartismandua—a very cat for intrigue and jealousy," growled Rargon.

The Roman laughed lightly.

"A dweller in the forests can hardly be expected to admire the most courtly of your British ladies," he answered. "Well, be she wise or no, she gave

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, B. xii. 37.

your Caractacus the occasion of a visit to the greatest city of the world. We all admired his noble mien. He gazed around with admiration, but with none of the cowering awe which overcame some of his followers. ‘Alas!’ he cried, ‘how is it possible that people possessed of such magnificence at home should envy Caractacus a humble cottage in Britain?’ His chains were struck off before he had time to get used to them; and his followers, if not he, will soon be allowed to return hither.”

“You saw it all?” asked Rargon’s wife.

“Surely!” answered the Roman, as if surprised by the question. Then, changing his tone, he added: “Yes; I chanced to be there.”

“You have soon returned.”

“Romans think little of such a journey as this. Day or night, we are ready to speed at the bidding of our Emperor.”

On the morrow the guest departed. The motherly care of Loren could not hold her wounded soldier longer from his duty. He took farewell with gratitude.

“Whatever I have suffered, or may suffer, at the hands of the Britons, the kindness I have here

experienced will efface the memory of it," he said feelingly. "Would that I could in some way repay you! If ever I can do you a service, I am at your commands. The name of *Ostorius* is not unknown, wherever the Roman army may be."

He pronounced the name as though expecting some great manifestation of surprise; but so profound was their ignorance of outer life that the name of the Roman general fell on idle ears. A look of mortification spread over his countenance, for Ostorius was ever sensitive to opinion and to praise.

"There is one boon I would crave," said Loren eagerly.

Her husband made a hasty sign, but she continued—

"No, dearest; do not stay me. It is not our liberty I ask; it is nothing that can humiliate you. This good soldier comes from Rome; he is gentle and kindly; may he not know that which we long to learn?—Friend, there is a God whose name we know not yet; He is a God of love; He needs no human sacrifice, for He gave His own Son once for all to be sacrificed for men. He only asks our love, and His reign is one of peace,

and sheds peace in the heart. He is known to some in Rome. Can you tell us His name, that we may worship Him as we ought?"

"Religion, lady, is scarcely heeded of a soldier. Cæsar is his god. But now I bethink me, the gentle Apollo may be He whose name you seek. Love and beauty and melody are his attributes. Or the hero Orpheus, who led back his bride from hell."

"Tell us more of them, that we may know," she urged.

The soldier shook his head.

"Lady, I have studied war, not the poems that tell us of the gods. Would I could serve you as you wish; but I live in hope that I may find some better boon to give than idle fables."

CHAPTER XII.

RE-UNITED.

O Poverty, though from thy haggard eye,
Thy cheerless mien of every charm bereft,
Thy brow that Hope's last traces long have left,
Vain Fortune's feeble sons with terror fly :
I love thy solitary haunts to seek—
For Pity, reckless of her own distress ;
And Patience, in the pall of wretchedness,
That turns to the bleak storm her faded cheek ;
And Piety, that never told her wrong ;
And mild Content, whose griefs no more rebel,
And Sorrow, listening to a lost friend's knell,
Long banished from the world's insulting throng ;—
With thee and thy unfriended offspring dwell.

BOWLES.

THE moonlight came quivering through the thick leaves, and a moaning wind, foreboding rain, sighed like a human voice. Strange shadows flickered on the pathless forest glades, and on a little figure, like some soft white animal, which had sunk down at the foot of one of the gnarled and aged oaks. It was Lusindora. Her strength was almost spent ; her strong young limbs were at last weary.

“O Thou, the true God,” she cried, “bring me to my parents in safety.”

A moonbeam flickered straight upon her, and seemed like an answering smile from Heaven.

“It would be so hard to die here, after all these weary nights and days, near them as I must be. The foliage hides the stars. I cannot escape from this dense wood, nor find a clear spot of heaven by which to guide my way. But better death, alone with the innocent wild things, than life with traitors. . . .”

“Surely I had shaped my course aright,” she thought—“southward, but tending a little to the west. So it was when I entered the forest, and I have striven hard to keep the straight line. Surely, if I could but see, I am in the Avon valley, not far from Bredon heights. I will sing the hymn which was our signal. Oh, if my father could but hear !”

She lifted a wavering voice in the well-known strain :—

“O King of Day, go to thy golden bed,
With all thy flocks and herds accompanied.”

Twice she repeated the long-drawn monotonous melody. Then, to her joy, she heard an answering sound, like a quail-call. Was it, could it be, the

signal? Once more her weak notes ascended; and this time a strong foot came dashing through the underwood, and Rargon stood before her.

“My father!” she cried, starting to her feet; and in a moment she was in his arms, and, ere long, in those of her mother.

O the beating of that mother’s heart! the almost awful unknown joy of having her child *her own*! Never since that little one could lisp her name had Loren known the joys of motherhood; and here at last was the child, free from the baneful influence of the priest, alone with her parents.

That night there was nothing but joy and gentle breathings of affection, and tender mother-care for the girl who had made so lonely a journey on foot in the wilderness. How had she been fed? how found her way? how escaped the wolves?

“The true God must have helped me, mother,” answered Lusindora; “night and morning I commended myself to Him.”

There was thanksgiving that night in the humble cot, and He whose name was hidden smiled, we may be sure, on the gratitude of His ignorant worshippers.

Many happy days did Lusindora spend in the

company of her beloved parents. As the rigid winter came on, there was happiness, and even a rude comfort, in the lonely hut. Time passed quickly with the drying of meat, the collection of nuts and roots, the plaiting of mats, the preparation of new garments from the choicest skins taken by Rargon. Never had Loren known the charm of a daughter's love and care, and at first it seemed to revive her strength. The rheumatic pains had diminished, and although the ague fever still recurred, she said it seemed better than health to be so tenderly nursed. But, as time went on, it was plain that the hope was false, and that she was gently fading from earth. The pale cheek and wasted form grew more and more fragile. Rargon saw it, and his wife knew well what the end must be ; but neither told their child.

“Let her be happy while she can,” said Loren. “I would fain have stayed with her, but it may be well that I am going, for, without me, you can take her to the northern wilds or to the southern coast, where the revenge of the Druids is less powerful. She will be a comfort to you, Rargon, when I am gone. I long but for one thing. Before my spirit goes out into the dark, I would learn where it

is going. I feel a hunger and a thirst to know more of the true God."

As she grew weaker, and the sad truth could no longer be hidden from Lusindora, this longing became past expression, a constant yearning. In her broken sleep Loren murmured, "Claudia, come and tell me;" and the eagerness on her poor face was painful to see.

Lusindora bore the blow better than her parents had expected. They had not understood the strength of her character. She had borne much sorrow in her young life, and she had learned to endure in silence. Her first thought was, not of her own approaching loss, but of the sufferings and wishes of her mother. At length she drew her father aside, and unfolded to him her plan. *He* could not show himself among men, nor could he leave his wife. Lusindora had no worse to fear than an enforced detention by Ungetorix, or Genuissa, should she have returned from Rome. But by caution she might escape both. In a little coracle which her father possessed, she would pass by night down the Avon and Severn, and, aided by the flow, might hope to reach *Caer Glau* and its palace by daybreak. Then, seeking the private

door to Imogen's apartments, she might enter unobserved, and would plead with that dear lady to tell her more, if as yet she knew it, of that new religion, which was of love and not fear; which could smooth the path of death, and turn sorrow into joy.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST-FRUITS OF BRITAIN.

Vital spark of heavenly flame,
Quit, O quit this mortal frame :
Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying—
O the pain, the bliss of dying !
Cease, fond nature, cease thy strife,
And let me languish into life.

POPE.

As the Lady Imogen was completing her simple toilet, she was startled by the noiseless lifting of the curtain in the doorway, and the entrance of a slender figure, equally noiseless. The intruder fell before her, lifting up imploring hands, and Imogen recognised Lusindora, but so changed that for the moment she was bewildered. A new look had come upon the girl's face—a look of womanhood and gentleness. Imogen raised her tenderly, and asked why and when she had left Cartismandua.

“ I left her many moons ago, lady ; I could not stay. Treachery was there. Know you that she betrayed our leader to the Romans ? ”

“Truly I feared it, child,” answered Imogen sadly. “But where have you been meanwhile?”

“I fled to my parents, guided by the stars. Sometimes I asked for shelter and food at some hut, and always received kindness; but, for the most part, I was alone by the woods and streams. I passed the winter with my parents in great happiness; but now my mother is dying, and she yearns night and day to know more of the true God—Claudia’s God. I have told her what you taught me. Do you know more?”

A holy radiance spread over the lady’s face.

“Girl,” she said, “that God has sent you hither. It is but three nights back that Bran and Eigen came again among us, and my brother Arviragus will speedily follow, when he has given proof of sure alliance with the Romans. We are conquered; our noble pride is broken. But who knows the end? Bran thinks that this humiliation is the paving of a way for the new and beautiful message which he has brought to spread over all our land. As yet we dare not speak aloud, for fear of the Druids. But their power must yield in time to the Romans; and meanwhile we will silently gather a band of true believers. Yes, Lusindora; Bran has brought back

the truth in full measure. You need fear nothing ; I am here alone, and no one will harm you. I will send and pray the aged Bran to come to me, and he shall tell you all your mother longs to know."

Tenderly the lady ministered to the girl's needs, and made her rest till Bran entered the apartment. Imogen stated the errand of Lusindora.

"It is a call from above," said he ; "the thing is in the air. A spirit is abroad, and no man can silence his voice. Your mother's hours are numbered, girl ; we will not delay ; you shall lead me to her."

Lusindora's face beamed gratitude, but she could hardly speak her thanks.

By noontide a simple boat, rowed by two, ascended the Severn. An awning covered the passengers, that no cruel eye might see or cruel tongue record the journey to Ungetorix. Ere nightfall the messenger of the Gospel stood by Loren's bed—the first deathbed in Britain cheered by that gracious sound.

The seed fell on good soil. Humble love and hope and faith received the news, that not alone was there one God, Whose name is Love, but that His Son, Who came to live and die for men, was God Himself.

This was the new story that is never old. This was what even loving faith stumbled at. Was it possible that He Who could dwell in joy above the stars had given up all, and come to dwell with men, not as a King, but as a toiler; and that, even when He went again to His glory, He took His Manhood with Him, thus for ever and ever uniting our weakness to His strength, and hallowing and saving our flesh by so doing? O could it—could it be? The thin hands of Loren were joined in earnest supplication, and Rargon's head was bowed in overmastering thought. But the young faith of Lusin-dora saw nothing to doubt, no room for aught but wonder and adoration.

“Daughter, fear not!” said Bran solemnly to the dying woman. “It is true, indeed. In Rome I saw those who had seen the Lord Himself, who had heard His gracious words, and seen the signs He worked to help men to comprehend that He was God indeed. He forgave sins. Who but God can do that? And in sign thereof He raised the helpless man to strength; He brought the dead to life at a word; He created food enough to feed thousands at a meal. But the greatest sign of all was in His presence and His face, and voice and loving

laws. Fear not, daughter, but believe. Tell me, do ye all here believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God?"

"I do," "I do," each answered,—Lusindora first, the others solemnly, after a pause of thought.

"Then bring me water, that I may baptize you, the first-fruits to Christ in this wild region, in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Water was brought. The sign of the Cross was made upon Loren's brow, thrice was she sprinkled in the Holy Names; and with the sacred sign came such a flood of light upon her face that it seemed as though the Sun of Righteousness were bathing her in His rays. Solemnly she waited till the ceremony was ended, and all were baptized. Then, spreading out her hands to each of her dear ones, who seized and held them, she said, with broken breath—

"The God of love, the true God, and His blessed Son keep you both, my darlings. I know not where I am going, but I feel it is to Him, and we are safe. With Him we must meet again. Father, I have no fear."

The aged Bran, standing by the bed, poured forth a prayer for mercy on this parting soul, and as he spoke a blessing, the spirit left her frame.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE TOILS.

The altar's pure flame
Consumes as it soars ;
Faith meekly may blame,
For it serves and adores.
Thou warnest and smitest ;
Yet *Christ* must atone
For a soul that thou slightest—
Thine own.

NEWMAN.

TIME went on. Harassed by the progress of the Romans, who began to feel that the destruction of the Druids would be necessary to their peaceful occupation of the island, Ungetorix had little thought to spare for Lusindora. He had once met Cartismandua since the great games at Gloucester ; but in the pressure of more important subjects he had not asked for the girl. Cartismandua was beginning to find her own people turning from her, under her husband Venusius, whom the western

tribes had taken for their leader after the capture of Caractacus. Ostorius found that the spirit which animated Western Britain was not due to that great leader alone. The Druids stirred up the native tribes if ever their spirit of independence failed ; and Ostorius Scapula, the gallant Roman general, was driven almost to despair by constant attacks.

The grave of Loren was green, and often did her child and husband visit it with prayers. It was their sacred spot, for as yet no church was raised in Britain, though Bran, by his gentle teaching, was winning here and there a soul to Christ. No occasion had yet come, however, for open preaching. It would have been too sternly repressed by Ungertorix, than whom never prelate wielded a prouder sway.

The great midsummer rites were drawing near, and the Arch-Druid willed that they should be specially imposing, so as to collect a larger assembly than usual. The Roman policy was never to interfere with the religion of those whom their arms had conquered. Thus, under cover of religion, a crowd could be assembled ; and if a more than commonly powerful assault should be made in consequence on

the Roman arms—why, so much the better. This was the policy of the Druids.

In view of a grand celebration, Ungetorix desired to increase the number of his priestesses, and his thoughts recurred to the beautiful wild maiden of Bredon Hill. He despatched a messenger to Cartismandua, to demand her in the great name of the goddess Duid-Ion.

On Bredon Hill the principal rites should be, though all over Britain fires of sacrifice would flame that fatal night. The fort on Bredon Hill had not as yet been taken by the Romans, and there was protection in its vicinity, which could not be found on the plains. Besides, it was possible that the Romans might remain ignorant of the spot where the rites should take place till too late to send a detachment to keep watch.

The messenger returned from Cartismandua with the message, that, on the night when Caradoc fled from the shelter of her castle (for thus she still pretended to disguise her treachery), Lusindora fled too. "Search for Caradoc, and you will hear of Lusindora," she added craftily.

Ungetorix received the news in silence, and scarcely a shade of deeper severity was to be seen

on his brow. He turned to the young priest who was copying a manuscript for him, and resumed his dictation.

But when night came on Ungetorix was pacing angrily to and fro in his private apartment. His dwelling, when on his western circuit, was on a sheltered ledge of the hill known as Cleeve Cloud, which attains the height of 1100 feet. Here was the Druidic settlement, well placed for communication with the west of Britain. A number of well-formed wattled buildings, with one higher than the rest in their midst—that of Ungetorix—were parted by some five hundred paces from a smaller settlement, where dwelt the priestesses.

The apartment of the Arch-Druid was furnished with severity, but with some dignity. A couch covered with fine wolves' skins, a bear-skin spread upon the floor, some mystic ornaments in wrought iron hanging on the walls, showed that the abode was that of a Briton of rank. And none—no chief or king in Britain—held higher rank than the Arch-Druid. The office itself was full of power and dignity; but when wielded by a man like Ungetorix, it became that of a despot. His will was of iron; there lay his weakness as well as his strength.

By it he forced others to obey him,—so far, well ; but by it he also was forced into actions sometimes unjustifiable and dangerous. He could not control his own will, and in such weakness has always lain the greatest risk to despots.

Ungetorix was much disquieted by the disappearance of Lusindora. It was against his will—that alone was enough ; but there was a further double reason why he desired to have her in his power : she offered a mode of revenge against Rargon, whom he hated with deadly hatred which no sufferings could appease ; and perhaps there was another sentiment more overpowering still, which he would not own even to himself.

He was meditating on the message he had received :—

“ Cartismandua wishes to deceive me. The girl is loyal and passionate. She discovered the Queen’s treachery and fled. But whither ? Poor child ! alone in those northern wilds, what may she not have suffered ? ” After some moments of reflection, he called loudly, and a young priest entered at once.

“ Attend me to Bredon Hill,” he said shortly.

Vardex was still in charge of the fort. The brave hill-men were not yet conquered, and to them

Venusius looked mainly for aid in carrying on a harassing warfare with the Romans. As the old captain sat alone in his hut, he was surprised by a visit from the Arch-Druid. He rose, in sign of respect.

"Sit, Vardex," said the priest, in a friendly tone. "I come to confer with you concerning the need of caution at our great festival. If Ostorius should get the alarm, he may send a detachment of troops. Your men must attend fully armed. It is in defence of the very gods themselves; the irregularity will be pardoned."

For some time they conversed on the details of the arrangement. Then Ungetorix added, in a careless tone—"Your little foster-daughter Lusindora is with you now?"

"She is in the care of Cartismandua," said Vardex, with surprise.

"She *was*, but is not now. Do you not know she has left the Queen?" he asked, with stern severity, bending his eyes on Vardex, as if he would search him through and through. The astonishment of the old captain was not to be mistaken.

"Has left her?—why?—when? Where is the poor child?" he asked eagerly.

“Vardex,” said the priest, in a lower and milder tone, “I see you are ignorant of her flight. I believed—nay, I hoped—she had found refuge with you. Cartismandua, as is her wont, tries to deceive me; but I believe the girl fled when she discovered the Queen’s atrocious treachery to Caradoc. That was some seven moons ago. Where is she now?”

Vardex was greatly agitated. He tore his hair, clenched his hands, strode up and down.

“My little maid, that was as a daughter to me,” he cried, “why did I let you go? why was I so faint-hearted as to fear to keep you here? Could I not defend you better than ever a one? Why did I think you could learn anything from those fine ladies but intrigue and deceit? O my girl, my girl!”

He sat down, and pressed his head between his hands.

“Be comforted, Vardex,” said the priest.

“Comforted,” he cried savagely, looking at him with fierce eyes, “when she may be lost in the woods, in famine or sickness, or a prey to some wild beast or cruel savage!”

“Fear not yet; she is not a common mind; she is keen and fearless, and can find her way; and innocence is respected of men and beasts. Let us rather

think where she can have taken refuge. With Imogen, perhaps?"

"True," cried Vardex, starting up; "she might fear to find the Romans in this camp, and go to the gentle Lady Imogen. But Imogen would have sent me word."

"Not so sure," answered Ungetorix; "the girl would wish to keep hidden from all for fear of Cartismandua." He might have added, "and of me."

"I go to Caer Glau with early dawn," continued the Druid. "Give me a shelter to-night, friend. Say not a word to any one; but if the girl chance to come to you, keep her, and send me word on the instant. I would give her the signal honour of being a priestess before the festival of midsummer; and thus not even Cartismandua or Genuissa can touch her," he added, seeing a shade pass over the face of Vardex.

When all was ready for the night's repose, and while Ungetorix was giving some secret orders to the priest, Vardex called loudly for Lareth; but no answer came. Again and again he called, and at last lay down, restless and uneasy both for his boy and his girl.

CHAPTER XV.

AN APPEAL FOR MERCY.

Custom lies upon us with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.

WORDSWORTH.

IT was the dead of night. Rargon and his daughter were asleep, when they were aroused by a low call at their door. Rargon started up and seized his sword, but the voice called—

“It is I—Lareth.”

In a few moments Lareth was admitted, and eagerly relating his story:—

“I was outside my father’s hut, and I heard the voice of Ungetorix. I listened, for he spoke of Lusindora. I heard him say he would go at dawn to seek her with Imogen, and methought when he found her not he might come here.”

“He does not know my father’s abode, Lareth, nor even that my father lives,” said Lusindora.

“Trust not to that,” answered Lareth. “He knows all; the trees, the streams have eyes and tongues for him.”

“Lareth speaks not untruly, daughter,” said Rargon; “the priest knows more than men suppose. He lets me live in peace because he can do no worse.”

“Why does he seek me?” asked Lusindora.

“To make you a priestess at the festival.”

The girl turned pale and shuddered, clinging to her father’s arm.

“O father, if he knows your abode, let us go! Let us go anywhere—anywhere, away from that terrible man!”

“Yes, child,” answered Rargon sadly; “we must go; we must leave the house where our blessed saint lived and died, where the aged Bran taught us the truth, and the grave where our dear one lies. The tyrant will not let us be.”

Lusindora looked round with an expression of the deepest, most unspeakable sorrow on the memorials of her mother.

“Oh, I have been so happy, so happy here!” she murmured. But then the restlessness returned. “Better to leave all than *you*, my father,” she said.

“Let us hasten to put up what necessaries we can carry. O let us hasten !”

She was almost feverish in her anxiety. Lareth helped her and Rargon to dispose such things as they had absolute need of in the smallest compass. From time to time he stopped to have a loving word with his young companion, but she could not rest.

“Whither shall we go, father ?” she asked.

“Methinks to the southern coast,” answered Rargon. “We will follow the stars over hill, over dale—not in any beaten track. And now, Lareth, farewell ; return to your father. You will be missed. If it is known that you have helped us you are ruined.”

“Let me go with you, Rargon,” urged the lad. “O let me go ! Lusindora and I are as brother and sister ; I will be a son to you. I cannot say farewell.”

He seized Lusindora’s hands, and they stood gazing on one another with affection. At that age—he but a lad, she in the dawn of a powerful womanhood,—the girl seemed the elder and superior of the two. He seemed to look to her for leave to stay ; she, with the loving dignity of an elder sister, sadly shook her head.

“You forget your father, Lareth,” she said. “Good, kind Vardex; why should he be deserted?”

Rargon added: “I would never bring on another the sufferings I have gone through. On all who aid me the same doom falls. For my daughter, the doom is softened by duty and love; but for you, both love and duty call elsewhere. Go, dear lad. We thank you for the dangerous proof you have given us of your affection; and now return before your father is too uneasy.”

“He will think I am at the salmon-fishing,” said he; “I will return when Ungetorix is gone. Let me help to bear your burdens to the river.”

Their needs were small, and ere an hour had passed they had bidden a last farewell to the dear hut and grave, and were on their way to the shores of the Avon, Rargon carrying his light coracle on his shoulders. Silently they went. The birds and beasts did not waken as they passed—but others were more watchful, more cunning; and before they reached the river-bank five strong priests sprang upon them, seized them, and bound their arms, crying, “In the name of the goddess!”

Burdened with his coracle, Rargon could hardly resist, and Lusindora was an easy prey; but Lareth,

with the strength of youth and the cat-like subtlety of lithe young limbs, twisted himself out of their hands in a moment, and began to defend and struggle.

“The lad is none of ours,” cried Rargon; “he only helped my girl carry her burden. If you would help us, go to Imogen; go—” he said to Lareth.

He was forced to utter the words aloud, though he would fain have kept the secret from the priests. In his urgent accents Lareth recognised the truth that his presence could only embarrass his friends, and while the priests were for an instant doubtful whether or no to take an additional prisoner, he solved the question by darting through the brush-wood like a lynx or a ferret.

When the Lady Imogen had received the courtly priest, who softened his despotic manner in addressing her—when she had assured him Lusindora was not with her, and let him go with the belief in herself that she had kept the secret of the girl’s home, whereas Ungetorix had read her like a book, and already knew that his priests would find her with Rargon—she was pondering in much anxiety on the future of her favourite. Her maiden entered to beg an audience for a youth, whose business was urgent.

Ever ready at the call of others, she admitted him, and was struck by the fine features and graceful carriage of the lad. His face seemed familiar, though he had developed greatly since she saw him at the games.

“Madam, I am Lareth, the son of Vardex, Lusindora’s foster-father,” he said. “I have come to you in haste. I have seen Rargon and Lusindora taken by the creatures of Ungetorix.”

“Of Ungetorix, boy? Impossible!” answered Imogen. “He has but just left me, after inquiring for the girl.”

“Nevertheless, madam, it is so. They were his priests. I know them well. They seized and bound them both.”

“Bound them?”

“Yes, madam, like escaped criminals.”

“What can be the priest’s motive?”

“Madam, those who oppose Ungetorix have no mercy to expect. For Lusindora he intends the priestess’s place. She hates and abhors him for his cruelty and pride; and as a priestess she will be ever near him, his creature, in his power. Besides, she has now a new lore, a milder religion which she had long been seeking for. You know?”

“ I know.”

“ She has told me of it once, but I cannot forsake the gods of my people. Yet it makes her hate the Druid more than before.”

“ Not so, Lareth,” answered Imogen gently ; “ her new religion makes her hate no one—not even the cruel Druid ; and when it is perfect in her she will not even seek to avenge her father’s sufferings. But she hates the more the Druid’s errors.”

“ True, lady. Whichever way it be, she has prayed me to kill her sooner than let her fall into the hands of Ungetorix.”

“ And her father—why bind him ? Is not his exile punishment enough ? ”

“ Who can say ? O madam,” cried Lareth, wringing his hands, and bending towards her in excitement, “ there is worse than banishment ; there is death in the priest’s power—the human sacrifice ! Pray the gods he does not intend Rargon for that ! ”

Imogen grew pale, and without a word struck upon a bell. Her maiden entered. “ Send a messenger instantly to recall Ungetorix to me,” she said, “ in utmost haste. He *must* find the priest ; and let him pray him in my name to return,

as I have urgent matter to speak of. Go you to the hall, Lareth ; I will tell you the result."

Before long the priest stood again before her.

"You summoned me on urgent matters, lady?" he said proudly. "I pray you hasten, for my business, too, is urgent."

"This is but a personal kindness which I pray at your hands, Ungetorix," said the lady, with a gentle dignity which became her well. "You owe your proud position to my father Cymbeline, and I and my brothers have ever treated you with honour. Never yet have I craved a gift from you, and I trust I may not crave in vain."

Ungetorix answered only by a bow.

"Is it so?"

"Name the boon, lady; if it be consistent with the honour due to the gods, the daughter of Cymbeline cannot be denied."

"I ask, then, for Lusindora to be my handmaid, and for Rargon to be my freedman," answered the lady.

The priest's eyes flashed, and a look of profound resentment crossed his face. It did not escape Imogen, though quickly suppressed.

"You said you knew naught of Lusindora; and

how know you aught of Rargon?" he asked, with sarcastic smile.

"I look neither for insult nor inquiry," answered Imogen, with a calm, queenly air; "I ask for an answer to my petition from the Ungetorix whom my father advanced to the post of Arch-Druid."

"Madam," answered the priest, with the same cold, cruel smile, "when Lusindora is found—if found she be—she is claimed by Duid-Ion, the mother of the gods; and Rargon, if alive, is demanded for the honour of our great festival."

"How so?" she asked sharply.

"I need not pain your delicate ears by a recital of the ceremonies which the gods demand to prove the subjection of our race. Those ceremonies have been too much slighted of late; the gods have punished Britain; and unless timely submission be shown, the god of the Cymri will cease from our land."

"You doom him to sacrifice?" she gasped, with an expression of indignant horror.

"I have not said it, lady. But this I say, that I have cast the horoscope of both, and that the oracle has said, 'The True Divine demands them.' It is not for me to argue with the gods. My gratitude

to Cymbeline, my honour to his daughter, though paramount in what concerns myself, are as naught to my duty to the masters whom I serve."

"Priest," said Imogen, her figure in its long black robe seeming to dilate, and her lovely face taking an unusual sternness, "know you that the maiden abhors your gods? Know you that your gods are naught? And have you searched your heart to see if there be not a less pious reason there for your claim on her?"

The priest's face grew dark, and he did not now seek to dissemble his anger.

"You tread on ground dangerous to yourself," he said sternly. "I leave you ere it be too late to serve you. You are suspected of doing dishonour to the gods. Let it not go so far that Ungetorix may be compelled to proclaim Cymbeline's daughter a recreant. As for me, my duty is known to myself; and be assured the gods are above us, and that I know it."

He left her without an obeisance, his long white garments sweeping behind him. She stood with her severe eyes fixed on him, unwavering. Like many gentle natures, Imogen had the courage of a lion. Her own danger never troubled her, but she

saw the priest's pitiless resolve for Lusindora and Rargon, and she saw too that the man's power lay in his earnestness: *he did believe in the gods he served.*

She remained some time as he had left her, then sank upon a seat, and summoned Lareth.

"In vain, Lareth, in vain—and you had guessed the terrible truth aright: Rargon will be sacrificed."

Lareth sank on his knees, and held out imploring hands to her—

"O lady, save them!"

"I cannot, boy. I am not a king. Nor even if I were, could I make head against the multitudes who hold this cruel superstition. Arviragus could not do it; Caradoc himself could not. Only one power can; and perhaps in time, with our destruction, that power may bring light and greater peace to our poor land."

"You mean the power of Rome, lady?"

She bowed her head.

"Even so."

Lareth rose slowly. He was silent; but Imogen saw a new look on his face, as of mingled hope and shame. She read the boy's transparent soul. He would be false to his country and his religion for

the sake of Lusindora. As a British princess, she *could* not summon Roman aid; but she would not hinder him.

“Lady,” he said reverently, “I thank you from my heart; you have been very gracious to the British lad, and very generous, for the sake of Lusindora and her father. Farewell, madam; I will try another means.”

“Farewell, Lareth. I cannot but wish you good success. I, alas! am powerless.”

CHAPTER XVI.

A DAWN IN BRITAIN.

From this happy day,
The old Dragon, underground,
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurpèd sway :
And, wroth to see his kingdom fail,
Swinges the scaly horror of his folded tail.

MILTON.

It was Midsummer Eve, the greatest festival of the four sacred to Druidic rites. They were in March, when the mistletoe was cut; on the 1st of May; on Midsummer Eve, and on the last day of October. A great assembly had been gathered, both in east and west. Ungetorix, an indefatigable prelate, had journeyed to the east to organise the rites, nor had left great Evrauc and Cartismandua in her perplexity unvisited. But he resolved to honour the west with his presence on the great day, because there lay the stronghold of the British force, and,

whereas nearly all the other tribes were now allied to Rome, the brave Silures and Ordovices under Venusius still held out. Their chief incentive was the urgency and exhortation of the Druids, for these men had a tremendous hold on the noble youth of Britain, whose instructors they were.

The Bel-fire was lit upon the summit of the hill, and an answering glare flashed from the several peaks of the Malvern range, from Cleeve Cloud, and from the height above Caer Glau, where the ancient fort had been before Roman alliance permitted the British chief to descend into the plain, and Arviragus built his town and temple in honour of Claudius.

A soft effulgence of moonshine dimmed the smoky light of the flame, and cast into strange relief the weird forms of the giant heads on Bredon Hill—the ancient King and Queen,—ever calmly gazing on votary or foe alike. They had been whitened for the festival,¹ and gleamed forth from the dusk of the surrounding turf and groves. Before them a giant altar was reared, and round it stood the priestesses in mystic circle, their bare arms flashing

¹ This custom was continued until within the memory of man.

in the light as they clashed their cymbals above their heads, and sang, with wild force and inspiration, a hymn to Hesus, god of war, who this day had been specially invoked to grant victory to the British arms. Among them, motionless, stood Lusindora—no longer the child, but a stern and splendid woman. She wore the long white robe, and the oak wreath on her hair; but her hands hung before her and her lips breathed no song. She did not resist when the sacred dress and ornaments were put upon her, for she knew resistance would be but vain and unseemly, and her faith was strong in Lareth and Imogen. Nor only in them. She had a higher trust. She had prayed night and day for her father and herself—less for life than for honour. She had thanked God that her sweet mother was taken gently from the earth before this terrible trial had befallen them, and all her prayers had been strengthened by the Name of Jesus. In our tranquil days, when the practice of religion gives us honour and earthly happiness, and the companionship of the best of our kind, we can scarcely realise the deep, passionate faith of those who lived in times when faith meant martyrdom. It was indeed full of life and force then, and the

spirit eye saw God more clearly than the bodily eye had seen the idols of its former ignorance.

Chained to the foot of a great rock was Rargon, tranquil to outward appearance, but inly less at ease than his child, for her future seemed very dark to him. He did not know—for she had never been allowed to speak with him since their capture—her firm resolve to destroy herself sooner than live as a priestess of the Druids. She knew where, at the foot of the “Queen,” the dagger had been hidden by Lareth; and if his friendly hand failed, her own should do the deed. Still ignorant of all but the rudiments of Christian love, she had no thought that it was a crime in the eyes of God to rob herself of the life which He had given. She did not know the higher martyrdom of calm resistance. But her thoughts dwelt little on death,—rather on the hope of an approaching rescue.

The eye of Ungetorix gleamed with triumphant malice on Rargon and on Lusindora, with the pride of a master in his favourite and newly-acquired slave. That look froze her soul; but she avoided it, and rather cast her loving glances on her father.

At length the hymn was ended, the clash of the cymbals died away, and for a moment there was

utter silence,—a pause as if men and nature were awaiting a crisis. The singing of the nightingale in the grove struck with a startling urgency upon the bosom of the silence.

Then Ungetorix spoke—

“Unbind the captive. Prepare the altar.”

Rargon rose calmly, as the chains which bound him to the rock were loosened; but a shudder ran through Lusindora’s frame—the first taste of that awful food, despair, that her brave spirit had ever fed upon. Was her hope, indeed, to be denied? Would no succour come, or would it come too late?

“Children,” said the penetrating, metallic voice of Ungetorix, “the gods are angered with us. Too long we have held in abeyance our mystic rites and human sacrifices—and Hesus, above all, was wroth. To-night we propitiate him by the blood of one of rank, a man known among you in former years—dear to me once, but who fell by pride, and became a recreant to our sacred worship. Rargon’s blood will, we trust, avail with the gods; for blood must wash away sin. He gives his life for his people and to his gods; and he has the pride of leaving his child under the special protection of the great goddess Duid-Ion. The sacred oracle will be consulted

from the flowing of his blood, and maybe the god will tell us, there and then, how and when to expect victory. Bind the captive on the altar."

It was done. Lusindora looked on with an awful concentration, and as Ungetorix took from an assistant the long and sparkling knife, and moved slowly forward, according to the rites, to describe a circle round the altar, holding the knife in his stiffly-extended arm, she uttered a piercing shriek, and would have rushed to her father, but that three strong priestesses held her writhing and struggling in their arms.

"Be calm, my daughter," cried Rargon, in a voice that did not tremble; "I shall not suffer. I am safe. Would God you were! but it is His will you stay a while to serve Him; only *let not your faith falter.*"

At this moment the blare of a trumpet close upon the scene startled the assembly, and cast them into disorder. They feared they knew not what, and the glitter of Roman helmets in the keen moonlight scarcely rose to the level of their fears. Had the gods themselves in angry phalanx marched upon them, it would have been scarce more than their high-wrought expectations. There was a clash of swords;

the men of the fort were on their guard, but the Roman power overcame. The flashing eyes of Ungetorix, his set teeth, and taut-stretched muscles showed the stern temptation to resistance ; but to fight was unlawful for a Druid priest, and self-discipline had become a part of his nature.

“In the name of the Emperor!” cried a voice, as three soldiers bound the Arch-Druid; and some one, in rich and gleaming armour, divided with his sword the cords which bound Rargon to the altar. It was Ostorius.

“Friend,” he said, aiding Rargon to rise, “I owe my life to your hospitality; and I thank the gods I am in time to return the gift.”

As the father and daughter stood clasped in each other’s arms, two men—a white-haired patriarch and a handsome youth—looked on in deep emotion; they were Bran and Lareth.

“Let us give thanks for this mercy,” said Bran; “and the people shall learn to share our joy. Ostorius will let me say a word for a religion which is more peaceful than that of the Druids,” he added, with the courtesy of one brought up in palaces. Ostorius gave an equally courteous assent.

“Rome quarrels not with myths and forms of

worship," he said, "unless, as in Britain, they become the engines of mischievous political movements."

Bran rapidly mounted the bank, and stood where Lusindora had stood when she first set eyes on Caradoc. His white hair gleamed in the moonlight and in the clear night air; and in the silence of dread which had fallen on the crowd each word was audible.

Behind him, in the distance, the Bel-fire flashed its fitful rays.

"Children," he said, "hear me. This is a great day for our land. For the first time we dare openly to tell you the truth—the great truth, for life or death—which concerns you all. Long have you worshipped the Sun-god, who sheds light and life around. By His true name I now declare Him unto you; and that name is Christ Jesus, the Son of the most High God, the Crucified."

Murmurs arose of surprise or anger, for the love of Christ in garbled form was not unknown in Britain.

The gentle patriarch spoke on. In simple, moving language, fresh from the source, he told, as he had heard from eye-witnesses, of the gentleness, the

dignity of Him Who was God revealed on earth. He proclaimed Him in His meekness King of kings and Lord of lords. "And here," cried he in a voice which rang across the hill-side, "I strike these senseless stones with my sword. Old King and Queen, resent it, if you can!" He was silent. A thrill of horror ran through the crowd. Ungetorix uttered a loud "Forbear!" Many looked to see the lightning from heaven strike the rash intruder. There was a flash. Some women screamed, and many thought vengeance had come. No; it was the Bel-fire, which gave a last leap, and died down for ever.

"See," cried Bran, "your fire-god yields before his Master. None will punish me in heaven, for He of whom I speak rules there alone. Children, there is pure water near. Come and let me sprinkle you in the thrice-holy Name, and wash away your sins in the all-cleansing Blood shed on the Cross."

He descended, and took his stand by the spring which bubbled forth within thirty paces of the spot. Some moved forward, some wavered, some drew back murmuring. But Lareth first sprang to his side, crying—

“Father, baptize me! I renounce the gods, in whose name injustice and cruelty are done.”

Scarcely had the lad thrown himself on his knees, than a great cry was heard, torn as it were from the very inner being of a strong fierce nature. With irresistible strength Ungetorix dashed aside the soldiers who held him, vaulted on the altar, and, seizing the sacrificial knife which gleamed upon it, he knelt there, brandishing the steel, and crying—“The gods shall have their victim; Hesus, may this appease thee!” he plunged it to the hilt in his own breast, and sank without a groan upon the altar reared for Rargon.

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